Consumption

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Consumption

by lookupkate

Summary

After getting out of prison, Will agrees to work with the FBI again - if only to keep his eye on Hannibal. As Spring blooms around them he accidently falls back in love with the bastard, and in turn, indulges some of his worst instincts.

They end up happy, but it's a long time before that happens. As Hannibal and Will change under pressure we see obsession brewing, arousal breaking through! It's going to be a long and bumpy ride for these two, over the next couple of months, and the only ones coming out unscathed are The devil and his man. Yikes. ♥💋♥💋♥💋♥

new chapter posted as soon as I'm finished with it! I'll update you on my progress!

Careful Now, Boy

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A full moon lit the chilly Spring night with a cool glow. The air was thickly scented, a bed of peonies in bloom and the Kentucky Blue wisteria trained lovingly up and along the tiered rooftops above it. The tang of blood saturated the scene and Hannibal swore he could taste it on the back of his tongue as he watched Will drive away.

The thought hit him: *Will was speaking his language.*

It was no wonder to him that Spring was the season so often associated with love's very budding. He felt the night air prickle his skin and the frogs' croaking finally registered in his hearing as his heart rate slowed. Love and birth, the magical thinking had him drawing connections that weren't there.

A scratching sound broke the peace and his hand slipped on the blood-slick handle of the knife still lodged in his side. The pain sent a shock through him as he walked stiffly towards his back door to let Dog out. It helped him along to have the dog to attend to, otherwise who knew how long he would have spent standing under the full moon in the spring breeze like a damned fool.

Dog scampered out and circled his legs like the nervous thing he was, and Hannibal fought the instinct to lean down to comfort him.

"Nothing's the matter, Dog, although I thank you for your concern and commend you for your curiosity," he soothed. "All those sleepless nights...didn’t I tell you Will would be back? Let's go in for the night, shall we, pup?"

Dog ran to pee on the trunk of the Japanese maple, more elegant than awkward under the arching limbs and striking red leaves, almost black in the moonlight. Hannibal paused at the door and then led them both in and through to the downstairs bathroom.

Luckily, this wasn't close to the first time he'd returned from out-of-doors covered in blood, so his canine companion followed him at a respectable distance after being told all was well. First, he needed to strip down the rest of the way and shower, then he could look at the wound. (He took a secret moment to appreciate that Will had thought to have him remove his shirt.)

He gripped the knife and dislodged it once he was in the tub, dropping it into the sink. Blood poured down his leg and over his foot to trail down the drain as he slapped a bleed-stop pad over it and pulled the curtain closed. The sight of blood running down his legs brought him back for a second to his health club, to his attempted crucifixion.

He’d forgiven Will in his mind for that, and thought he had insinuated it with enough clarity for Will to understand without him exactly saying it. He looked at his wrist, at the healed

scar, and let the water wash over him.

Dog sat on the closed toilet lid like a sleek gargoyle and watched his master strip his bloodstained clothes and put them into a plastic bag. He was patient because they had performed this task many times since he had come to live with this man.

Step one: Blood.

Step two: Sit on toilet.

Step three: Master showers.

Step four: *Cheese.*

The pattern was the same, and he knew to wait on the toilet lid until his master got out of the shower, but this time it *smelled* different. Something about the blood was wrong, so the moment his master was in the shower he was hopping down and snatching the knife from the sink, eager to see what he could taste. He was gentle with it, holding it with his mouth softly, and dropped silently onto the bath rug on his stomach to inspect it.

"That knife handle is made from a tree I grew on my property in Canada, Dog. Maple burl is delicate, soft," Hannibal chastised with little heat. "Give it."

The dog obeyed immediately and Hannibal got back under the spray on the shower with the knife in his hand, no worse for wear. He turned it over and went about washing it carefully. The wood looked redder in the water and as he weighed the knife he found himself smiling.

"Payback with my own weapon," he murmured, setting down the knife on the edge of the tub and soaping himself up.

The tug of pain with every breath was wonderfully fresh, bright and new, a perfect addition to the familiar smell of blood. He tried to center himself and take care of the task at hand but possibilities, endless and unfurling, wove through his mind. The shower was purposefully cut short, and he was soon enough turning the water off and cleaning the wound in the basin of the tub on his knees. He pulled out the emergency kit from behind the toilet and picked the right needle and thread for the job. Six perfect stitches and the wound was closed and soon meticulously covered.

For a moment, ignoring the protestations of his knees, Hannibal wondered again at the choice of weapon; a knife with a short enough blade to not rupture anything important, but wide enough at the base to make you really *feel* those inches. When had Will taken it? Why hadn’t he noticed it was gone?

The memory came into his body with a rush of chemicals and a woozy sort of sense of destiny: he’d left the oyster knife behind when he had made the two of them a clambake, something about the way Will had held the knife, the beauty of its utility in his hands.

It hurt when he stood and he weighed the possibility of calling off work for the week to convalesce, but that was getting ahead of himself. He used the shower head to rinse the blood off his knees and shins, chasing it down the drain and rinsing out the whole basin. He knew Dog was waiting for his cheese, so he pulled on his robe and kissed the beast on its small head.

“Cheese, Dog,” he affirmed, and the rascal was leaping ahead of him and slipping across the floor in a dash to his kitchen bed.

He couldn’t help but appreciate the eagerness for obedience and structure the canine offered him, and he wondered absently if Will enjoyed being the head of that massive pack, if he might look for control elsewhere.

On the interstate, speeding more than his old sedan was built for and trying to convince himself he was going home, not running away, Will was seeing red. He was biting viciously at the tease Hannibal had left him with. Jesus Christ in Heaven, it was so close to how it was in the beginning. Hate, seething jealousy, raging vindication, and he was *hard.*

He picked up his phone and made an impulsive call, suddenly unwilling to wait to find out. The phone rang twice and he realized what an asshole he was going to look like, but by then it was too late.

"Will?" Alana's voice was concerned, but not sleepy, so Will took a deep breath and pressed on.

"Yeah, sorry it's late. I was just wondering," he started. Hearing his own voice had his stomach dropping, and he could barely get the words out. "You weren't over at Hannibal's house tonight, were you?"

It sounded so impossibly jealous as he said it and Will felt all his newfound power and determination crumble and turn to ash. It occurred to him that it might be more painful if she said no, if it was some new person in Hannibal's life. At least if he was sleeping with Alana, Will could understand why.

"No," she replied. "Are you alright, Will?"

"Is he seeing anyone?"

He spat the sentence out so quickly he actually surprised himself. He could hardly see the road ahead of him, he could hardly breathe.

"Jesus, Will," Alana replied, exasperation clear in her voice.

"I know, look, I know how this sounds-" Will tried.

"Do you?" Alana asked, voice tight.

She paused for long enough that Will was worried she had hung up. He took his exit, kicking up gravel from the shoulder as he hastily pressed on the brakes. For a moment before she

spoke again Will forgot what the phone was doing in his hand.

"You two keep putting me in the middle, and I just can't, okay? I care about you both, obviously, but I can't do this with you."

She was right, of course she was right. He apologized profusely, the whole time trying to imagine the next person Hannibal would choose for his bed.

"It was my first day back at work today," he said with a sigh. "I'm sorry I called. It was impulsive."

Alana accepted that as truth and said goodbye, but the question of who was in Hannibal's house ate at him the rest of the way home.

He was relieved to be met by his pack at the front door. If he needed reliability, he thought, he need look no further.

He gazed up at the moon after letting the dogs out to circle the trees and smell what wildlife passed through over the evening, handkerchief getting the remnants of blood from his fingernail edges with agitated movements. He never wanted to look up at the moon through a chain link fence again, he never wanted to live in solitude again. He would be insane to call Hannibal when he got inside. It would be insane to risk his freedom due to a little jealousy.

The calm that came over him breathing in the night air with the dogs, feeling them mill around his legs in the dark, it hit him a bit deeper as he planned out his next move.

Careful now, boy.

Alana had tried to warn him against engaging with Hannibal a half dozen times over the last month. Sometimes he wished he could tell her the truth, but she'd proven herself unwilling to see that side of Hannibal. She knew Hannibal could be dangerous, but she assumed that was just a trait that only came out when he was under threat. She thought Will was *baiting* him.

He wondered what she would think if he actually unmasked the Ripper.

Two hours after Will had left, Dog was asleep in his bed and Hannibal was on his second glass of red wine, listening to music and drifting in and out of his conscious mind. The prosciutto and cheese were gone and the knife was laying on the tray next to his bed, used for culinary reasons once again, if not its intended purpose.

The crickets and frog song coming through the open window seemed to synchronize with the music and for a moment Hannibal was floating into sleep sitting up. There was a sense in that moment of all the world dimming, then the phone rang.

He drank down the end of the wine quickly and cleared his throat before answering.

"Hello?"

"You sound like you were asleep," Will accused through the phone. A warmth crashed over Hannibal at his voice, and he snorted as Will got to the point. "Is your guest still there?"

"Is that why you called?" Hannibal replied with a smile. "He's asleep at the end of the bed." He paused for effect and then added, "and your pack? Are they also sleeping?"

"Your guest is a *dog,* " Will concluded, the sound of water sloshing in the background giving away where he was. "When did you get, wait, why did you get a dog?"

"Where are you, Will?" Hannibal shot back.

"First of all, I didn't call you to answer your questions," Will countered, "and second of all-"

"Are you in the new tub?" Hannibal asked, hissing in pain as he finally bent over to set his wine glass aside and pick back up the knife. "Have you tried out the heating element in the floor yet? Is everything to your liking?"

"It's too big. I don't need a tub this big. I have no idea why you went to the trouble of…" Will began.

He paused and let out a deep breath and Hannibal swore he could feel it along his skin. He held the knife to his mouth and licked the blade clean, cock twitching to attention against his thigh. He'd waited so long for this, so long to speak to Will again, to have some connection.

"I feel like we're skipping over something important," Will murmured, bringing Hannibal's attention back to the conversation.

"Thank you for returning my oyster knife, by the way," Hannibal replied. "I'm holding it right now."

"Jesus," Will all but breathed out.

"You aren't interested in answering my questions, and I'm learning to practice flexibility in intimate relationships, so why don't you ask me the question you called to ask, Will?" he replied. "Ask me anything you like."

"How did it feel when I stabbed you?" Will asked, sounding out of breath.

Hannibal had to laugh. Of course Will wanted to know. He wanted recognition that their little game wasn't one sided.

"Erotic," Hannibal admitted. "Inevitable. You're forgiven."

"Even for pissing on your leg at the opera?" Will asked.

"...certainly not, the second half of the play was dreadful without you," he finally allowed, hand dropping the knife to hold himself through his boxers.

The burst of laughter through the phone hit Hannibal like a truck and he let his head tip back and his eyes close. It was like the most beautiful music.

"Are you touching yourself?" he found himself whispering to Will as he gave himself a slow stroke before pulling his boxers down.

"Well shit," Will sputtered, " *now* I am."

Hannibal hummed and shifted his hand, gripping himself tighter through the pain in his side. The head of his cock was damp as he brushed his thumb over it.

"Hannibal?" Will murmured.

"Mmm?"

Of all the questions that could have come next, Hannibal didn't even consider what did.

"Who do you eat breakfast with now?" Will asked, breathing hard into the receiver.

"No one," Hannibal replied. "Just Dog. Were you worried I had replaced you?"

"Shut up," Will shot back, grunting as he got closer. "Tell me you still want me. Tell me…tell me…"

"I've never stopped wanting you," Hannibal found himself growling back, fucking up into his fist, each movement struck through with lightning-like pain. "I want you. I want all of you."

"Fuck!" Will shouted, grunting over the sounds of displaced water and a glass hitting the new tile floor and shattering. "Ah, shit!"

"Come on, come on," Hannibal chanted, to Will, to himself, to his hunger and bloodlust and the *fire* in his chest.

Tipping over into orgasm had his ears buzzing and his legs cramping and shaking. His whole body convulsed as come landed up his stomach and into his chest hair. He breathed roughly through it, mouth open and eyes clamped closed.

Will cleared his throat after a while and Hannibal melted back against the headboard and sighed, wrung out completely.

"One more question," Will insisted gently.

Hannibal hummed and he went on.

"Did you seriously name your dog Dog?"

Laughing along with Will again, it occured to Hannibal for the first time since he had framed Will that this thing between them just might work.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal: I eat alone. Why, do you miss me?

Will: if you shut up now I might be able to come

Hannibal: 😍😍😍😍😍😍😍😍

Ps

Hannibal, describing the knife like it's a dick: 👨🏫

Me, writing this: 😐 this is much too horny

Hannibal, looking into my soul from the depths of my imagination: 🥳🤑👹

Me: ugh, fiiiiine. Whatever

Heat

Chapter Summary

The morning after, and Will is on the case.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I’m alive and well, let’s do this! Pssst, 1969 words 😂😂😂

The campus was blanketed in new growth and fog that chilly morning. The ivy that hung over the concrete walls of the school had miniature leaves on every stem, lightening the overall hue. The bright green leaves on the crisscrossing, pencil thin, new limbs of the Paper Birch created a screening effect and cast the morning in a rich glow. Every Spring brought balance to the campus, to Will's senses when he was on the campus.

His balance faltered as he saw Hannibal's Bentley idling next to a row of hedges. They were outgrowing their cylindrical forms, covered in stems reaching for the sky so the car looked out of place, funereal with its shining black paint.

He pulled in next to it and turned off his car, soothed by the sounds of it cooling.

Click, click, hiss.

Scratch.

Something echoed in his brain and for a second he remembered Hannibal's doppelganger, kneeling in the weeds, eyes shining red. His body seemed so confused as to whether he was afraid or aroused that he felt a thick dullness fall over him like a heavy blanket. Static seemed to fill his ears and he swallowed hard.

He focused his eyes out the driver's side window and heard Hannibal exit his vehicle. With the press of a button he unlocked the doors and then just *gripped* the interior door handle like it was a lifeline.

It felt as though oxygen was reintroduced to the atmosphere as the passenger door opened, and Will drew in a ragged breath.

"Good morning," Hannibal said, sliding into the seat next to Will with a little less of his usual grace. "I made pecan pancakes, and butter from apples I grew myself. Coffee?"

Will kept his eyes on the scenery and hummed his answer with a slight nod of the head, and soon enough he had a travel mug in his hand. He tipped it back and sucked on the lid with some force then pulled the travel mug back and hissed in pain, his tongue and inner cheeks bright with pain.

"It's a little *fucking* hot," he accused, taking the lid off carefully so he wouldn't spill any in his lap. The amount of steam that escaped the half full cup was suspect.

"Is it?" Hannibal replied, his smile somewhere between fond and conniving as he held up a small decanter, "Cream might bring the temperature down-"

Will let him yammer on, almost *enjoying* the little slight, running his sore tongue along his teeth. At least it made sticking to his guns easier.

"I need you to draw up an itemized list of every material used in the updates at my house, so I can settle that debt with you," he said, holding his mug out for the cream. "Minus the stuff you used from my storage."

"I *really* don't think you want to know how much that tub cost," Hannibal wagered, starting to plate the pancakes and open the apple butter. He was much too comfortable for Will's taste.

"I'll need that by Friday," Will pressed.

"You wouldn't allow it to be a gift from a friend?" Hannibal tried.

Snared.

Will finally looked him in the eye and smiled. He took the plate as it was passed to him and filled his mouth with a generous first bite, betting that drawing out his answer would be annoying to Hannibal. He could barely taste the apple butter because of the burn, but the texture made up for it. Closing his eyes, he chewed and swallowed, giving very little thought to anything much at all as he finished the bite and drank his now perfectly good café something or other.

"Do you want me to charge you for labor?" he asked at last, licking his lips and raising his eyebrows, granting more eye contact if only to get the point across. "I'll pay well above minimum wage."

"Fine," Hannibal huffed. "The labor is the gift, the parts I will concede. Where did you learn to bargain?"

Will snorted and opened the car door, stepping out to face Hannibal. It was difficult to look him over knowing what they'd done the night before, what he looked like naked, what he looked like *pleased.* No matter how angry he was, no matter how bitter, he still wanted him. He looked over Hannibal's face slowly before speaking.

"In prison," he said, words like daggers. "How's your side?"

The immediate look that overtook Hannibal was enough to have Will feeling high. He could see Hannibal calculating his next move: retreat or bite. He licked his lips, more than a little

turned on by this new dynamic between them.

“You are a cruel lover,” Hannibal replied after much thought.

Will grinned at him, euphoric with the knowledge that he was reeling in the *fucking* Ripper. “Oh, darlin,” he said, drawing out the word, “you ain’t seen nothin yet. Now get out of my car, I’ve got work.”

Hannibal laughed freely, actually surprised, and the feeling *that* drew from Will had him questioning his next move all the way to his morning meeting with Jack.

“Alana Bloom is concerned about your behavior.”

Jack watched surprise fall over Will’s face as he said it. There was silence in the dim office, half the lights off and the door shut. It took a second for Will to figure out his angle and Jack was reminded once again how very like a school principal he felt. If only the stakes weren’t so damned high.

“Hannibal isn’t,” Will countered, indignant now, till the end.

Well, Jack thought, he had a good point. “Does that mean breakfast went well?”

Will stiffened at the question and went to stare at the pictures tacked to the wall; a wide display of what was left behind by what local news had dubbed The Organ Harvester. Four pale bodies, organs removed like batteries, playthings tossed aside.

“He is on campus for no other reason than to feed me,” Will shot back. “I would think you could disregard Dr. Bloom in the face of my *progress*. Or am I the only one taking the Ripper seriously?”

It was petulant, but Jack was used to it. “I’m taking him seriously. I could take him a bit *more* seriously if you gave me motive. You’re back on the job, now it’s time for your side of the bargain.”

“Fuck off,” Will spat, pulling it back almost immediately. “Sorry, sorry.”

Jack was reminded of a man in his neighborhood when he was growing up who was a real asshole. That old man took it too far one day and kicked the dog. After that the little thing bit at anyone and everything, always expecting the boot.

“His murders are murders of domination, nothing less will do,” Will said, interrupting his thoughts. “We always thought the Ripper stalked victims for their looks, and that the Stammets case was the outlier. I think we were wrong. This whole time we believed the narrative that he set up for us, the idea that he was a calculating artist, only interested in the beauty and the message he was sending.”

The hair on the back of Jack’s neck was standing up. He nodded so Will would go on.

“He knows his victims,” Will said, looking him right in the eye for the first time that day. “He picks out people he finds repugnant, and then he waits. The artistry is step two, step one is always revenge.”

The sound of the door swinging open gave them very little time to sit with that truth. Beverly walked through the door and looked them over, a smile forming on her face as the men turned to look at her.

“Geez, guys. Who died?” she joked.

Hopefully nobody new, Jack thought. He swore he could feel a rifle sight on his forehead.

Alana Bloom had barely slept the night before. She'd tossed and turned, and then given up and journaled about the issue of Will and Hannibal.

She was a therapist and she worked with families, she knew the signs of an abusive relationship. She wasn’t sure how the two men fit together, but she knew it was mutually assured destruction.

She wanted to make it stop it.

“Codependents usually-” she murmured to herself as she pulled into the parking lot closest to her office at Quantico. “-usually assume others can’t take care of themselves,” she finished from memory.

There was a bit of peace unfurling in her, but it snapped like a tight string when she saw Hannibal getting into his Bentley.

“Fuck.”

Car parked, she grabbed her bag and coat and exited the Benz, locking it with a gentle beep from her key fob and an answering one from the car. Hannibal cocked his head as he heard it, looking like he was sniffing the air.

“Dr. Bloom,” he nearly purred, turning around and pulling himself to his full height. (Jaguar, not pussycat.) “What a delightful surprise.”

Her stomach turned as he closed the driver’s side door and leaned back against it. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

“You better have a good reason to be here,” she said, voice wavering as she let go of all of her planning. “Do you have coffee?”

He smiled at her attempt to soften the blow and nodded deeply before opening the car door. When he straightened back up he held out a travel mug and some creamer. She took it and cleared her throat, then leaned back against the car and looked off into the distance as she added more creamer than normal. The only bright side to this interaction.

“Why are you cross with me this time?” Hannibal asked after some silence, his voice suggesting it could be played off as a joke if she liked.

“Will isn’t stable,” she insisted. “You know he hasn’t processed his time in jail, you know he doesn’t intend to find insight in anything that isn’t a bottle. Why on *Earth* are you pursuing him?”

It was so much closer to the truth of how she felt than she had intended, but the anger bubbling up in her couldn’t be anything but listened to. She felt righteous. She’d been through this with him before. Hannibal was reckless in love and she couldn’t stomach the thought of him burning everything he’d built down, not again.

“We just shared breakfast,” Hannibal replied. “I promise nothing unstable happened.”

“The fact that you aren’t taking any of this seriously is disturbing, Hannibal. Do you not see that?” she pleaded. “He accused you of murder! You two are, are-“

“Will understands me,” Hannibal interrupted, stupidly calm. “Is that what you’re jealous of? That he *fully* understands me, unlike you?”

She couldn’t help but roll her eyes, the heat spreading over her face telling her she was blushing. She wanted to cry, to scream, he was so *frustrating*.

“Let me be more specific,” she tried. “You are *both* unstable. I’m just trying to be a friend here. You both do that, you know? You flirt to change the subject, it’s annoying at best.”

“In that case,” Hannibal pivoted, grinning. Whatever was coming next was a manipulation, she wasn’t talking to Hannibal anymore, she was talking to the hungry wolf. “Should I be the one who is jealous?”

Alana took the last sip of coffee and pressed the empty mug into Hannibal’s chest. He brushed his fingers over her inner wrist as he grasped it and her stomach was fluttering, betraying her completely.

“I remember when you fell apart before,” she said flatly, sighing before going on. “You aren’t pretty enough that any of us have forgotten. Just...think of your career before you make any rash decisions.”

“Yes, Mother,” Hannibal answered, smiling to himself still.

She rolled her eyes again and walked away, defeated.

I'm An Asshole

Chapter Summary

Will has a shitty day and Hannibal gets his curiosity piqued by an annoying patient.

Chapter Notes

Coming back in, slow but steady. My brain is starting to allow me to write a little bit again! Wooooooohooooo

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A perfect breakfast with Will and a chance to get under Alana's skin for once. It was almost too much to ask for on such a beautiful Spring morning.

As Alana left Hannibal standing in the parking lot to attend to her job, he wondered absently how many more *warnings* she would give him in the coming months. It was a very American thing to make a request to the tune of 'Stay away from that boy!'. He'd watched enough American movies to pick up on that trope. He would have to ask Will if she gave him similar advice.

He checked his watch as she walked just out of sight and got in his car. As he pulled off the main street and onto the freeway he remembered who he had scheduled that morning.

He was coming close to breaking promises and getting an updated phone number for Bedelia, so out of sorts with this patient. Giving a referral should have been easy, but some side of him wanted to dig a bit more before letting go.

On arrival, he was dismayed to see Franklyn waiting on the front sidewalk, waving like the embarrassment he was. Hannibal decided he would raise his fee substantially, and pulled the car off the street. It took a moment alone in the driveway for him to compose himself. The thought of quitting his practice came to mind but he pushed it aside, knowing full well the trouble he was capable of when he wasn't fully stimulated.

As he unlocked his practice from the back door he promised himself he'd make something extravagant for breakfast the next day for Will as a treat to himself. That settled, and all the lights and papers in order, he walked to the patient entrance and opened the door.

"Doctor Lecter," Franklyn admonished, smiling and shaking his head, "I believe this is the first time you've made me wait. Is that a sign of personal stress, or is love in the air?"

Hannibal simply waited for him to enter and then gave a curt bow. “I hope you will forgive me,” he allowed. “I was meeting with a colleague and I let time get away from me. Please, take your seat.”

While Franklyn managed to follow that command Hannibal made a decision. He went to his desk and pulled out Franklyn's entire personal file, three inches thick. Irritation was creeping up behind his eyes, making him grit his teeth and drop some of his act. Franklyn watched him with growing suspicion as he came to sit in the chair opposite.

“Franklyn,” he began, holding the man’s file like a prosecutor with a trove of evidence. The room grew noticeably quieter. “We need to have a conversation-“

“Don’t tell me you’re going to refer me, don’t!” Franklyn pleaded. *“You* were a referral!”

“And unfortunately, I don't believe I can help you as a therapist anymore. You deserve better care than I can give you.”

It was a different version of the truth than what was pumping through Hannibal's veins at that moment. The impulse to pounce on Franklyn and crush him like the mouse he was, *that* impulse he could taste. He wanted to crack all his ribs and break his little neck, and he wanted his spine-

“I think Tobias might be a murderer,” Franklyn spat, eyes watering with actual fear. “He's started saying things that are just- He swears he's joking, but looking in his eyes…I can’t, I just, I can’t-“

Hannibal could smell the fear in the air, pricking his nose and setting his anger on the back burner for the time being, hunger piqued. Curiosity once again had the reins.

“Please," he began again, tucking the file to his side and pulling out a notepad, "tell me more.”

The smell of the basement at Quantico was a mix of industrial cleaner and sweat. Bitter, acrid. The rooms reeked of anxiety.

Even the most veteran lab tech had that moment when they came across a body that was just a little *too* familiar, the tattoo they got with a group of friends in their twenties, a woman that could be their mother, their aunt. Children. (As a rule, it was easier to see an adult body as simply the vessel of a lost consciousness. With children, the idea that they might wake up was just too sticky, even on a slab.)

Bleach and grief, and sometimes shit. That mixed with a two hour meeting with the big boss after his meeting with Jack and, well, he felt right at home. *He felt like shit.*

“I’m not saying he didn’t remove the organs *cleanly,”* Beverly insisted, her voice helping him triangulate where the crew were down the hall. “Just not *precisely.”*

“The Ripper takes his time, he has a place to kill,” Jimmy chimed in. “Why on *Earth* would he gut someone in a hotel bathroom?”

As Will came around the corner he saw the three of them dressed in their paper suits, face shields in place, bent over the body from the green tile bathroom.

With all the blood washed down the drain and none in the cavity you could really see what had happened. The ends of the veins that had been clamped off leading to where his missing pieces should have been were pale and rubbery. The cut near the ribs was much less careful and Will could see the scene playing out in front of him.

He could feel the blood, his body trying to find purchase on the cold bathtub through a gauze of sedation and shock. Flip, flip-flopping and gasping for air, the desperation of an injured animal. And then, lightning *and everything flashed to a stop.*

His mind screamed as all autonomic nervous system functions were cut off. There was no more gasping breath or pumping blood, there was no motion at all, and he knew he was dying.

Someone was drawing near, looming over him, and then they were opening him up.

Not completely, not wide open, no, just enough to slip a hand deep into him. One, two, three-

“He wasn’t supposed to die,” Will said, voice soft as the other three argued.

“What was that?” Beverly asked, hands up in the air to signal the room to silence.

“He wasn't supposed to die. He was supposed to wake up in the tub with all the ice. The killer usually works in his own space, this time, for some reason, he couldn’t. He was going to remove an agreed upon organ and leave, but this poor bastard woke up partway through,” Will explained.

The screams of agony and panic filled his mind again and he accidentally bit through his cheek, blood pouring into his mouth.

“He panicked," Will sputtered, wiping a bloom of blood from his lip. "Shock at his situation caused his heart to give out. We'll find an underlying cause for the failure; undiagnosed."

There were whispers in the room, but he wasn't deterred, not now that he could see it so well.

"The cut to get to his heart wasn’t to take it, it was to revive it. Our surgeon tried to save his victim, but he’d made too many mistakes,” he concluded, turning to face Brian Zeller fully. “His mistakes were what made him a killer. When was the last time the Ripper made a mistake?”

There was a ringing silence for a moment as they all froze. Brian pulled off his gloves and set them aside so he could cross his arms, slide his hands into his armpits in discomfort. Everyone waited.

“Well,” Brian replied, stone cold, “he fell in love with *you.”*

The room burst into riotous movement and curse words, everyone pushed to their limit. Will just nodded and gritted his teeth, unwilling to delve into anything with Brian.

“Thanks so much for the welcome back,” he spat, turning to leave the room and riling the group up further, "I think I’m done here.”

He focused on the low buzz of the fluorescent lighting in the hallway and his own breathing as he walked to the stairwell, head down and seething.

“Will.”

He was on the fifth step, half out of sight. *He could still leave.*

“Will?” Beverly said, a bit quieter.

He gripped the handrail, stuck where he was, unwilling to be rude to Bev but needing to *flee.* A few huffs of breath and his mind offered a compromise.

“Wanna come with me?” he asked, his voice not quite steady.

“Play hooky?” Beverly replied gently, the soft whisper of laughter. “Fuck yes. Where can I meet you?”

Will couldn’t turn, couldn’t make himself look at her, so he had to decide on his own.

“My place.” he answered.

Having Bev over was as close to his old life as he could get, and yet Will felt out of place. He slammed closed the first of the new kitchen cabinets, hands shaking in anger as he looked for the stash of whiskey he knew should be in there. It spooked a few of the dogs and that was the final straw.

"Fuck!"

Fumbling in his pocket for his cell phone, fingers slick with sweat, he felt himself slipping very close to a panic attack. His fight or flight response was tripped and he was dialing Hannibal's number before he could think. It rang once and Hannibal's voice came through the receiver, concerned.

"You want to remind me where I keep my fucking whiskey now?" Will fumed. "I don't know where fuck-all is in here, you know that? My own fucking kitchen and I'm a stranger!"

He could tell he was crossing a line, could feel that acidic rush in his stomach that always preceded a schoolyard brawl. He wanted to get in the first hit.

"Sometimes I fucking hate you!" he added impulsively, leaning into brutal honesty with his full weight.

It took ten pained breaths before Hannibal answered him, and by that point Will was shaking all over.

"It sounds like you've had a hard day," Hannibal allowed. "Your whiskey is under the sink, in the white tub. Can I bring you dinner?"

"Beverly's coming over," Will replied with much less gusto, kneeling in front of the sink and opening the cabinet doors. "For drinks."

The moment the bottle was in his hand he sank down to lean against the fridge and sighed into the phone.

"Better?" Hannibal asked, voice never wavering.

"I'm an asshole," Will admitted.

"I'm a serial killer," Hannibal shot back playfully.

"Jesus," Will snorted, "you're going to get caught talking like that."

"Have fun with your friend, darling," Hannibal cooed. "Call me this evening if you like."

Will grit his teeth and shook his head, exhausted by the roller coaster of emotions, and just hummed in agreement before hanging up. He dropped his phone to the side and cracked open the new bottle of whiskey, taking a long, biting pull.

"I'm an asshole," he whispered to himself as a few of the dogs drew near to check on him now that he wasn't screaming.

Chapter End Notes

Will: I HATE YOU SOMETIMES

Hannibal: is that all?

Will: no!

Hannibal: what can Daddy do for Princess?

Will, blushing and furious: Princess needs her whiskey

I'm Not Going Back to Prison

Chapter Summary

Beverly and Will have a heart to heart.

Chapter Notes

So glad to get this chapter done! Let's give it up for friendship, y'all!!!

By the time Beverly pulled her Jeep onto the long dirt road leading to Will's house she was searching the glove box for a loose granola bar and cursing herself for not going through Shake Shack. It was usually a good idea to go into the morgue on an empty stomach, and God knew it had been a ripe day, but now she was fucking starving.

"There you are," she said, pulling out a beaten packet and tearing the edge of the foil off with her teeth. "Come to Mama."

Mouth full of what was entirely loose granola at that point, and hunger sure to be temporarily sated, she was able to take in the beauty around her. Yellow, white and purple wildflowers lined the long road in all their glory.

"Glory glory," she mumbled as she emptied the end of the packet into her mouth. "Hallelujah."

The thistle grew tall, early buds periwinkle in the frills of frosted, reaching leaves, opening to the most vibrant purple one could imagine. Yarrow, or maybe Queen Ann's lace, in large clumps between, muscling its way to the sun with its sizable heads of yellow and white blooms. Some creeping flower wove throughout, and clumps of large bushes of white flowers shaped like trumpets, the ends of the robust petals pointed like an elf's shoe.

What had been dried and grey just a month earlier was green, so green Beverly felt it on the back of her throat. Lemongrass tea, some hope for thaw. Another chance at the wheel of time.

The turning of the seasons drew heavily on her as she approached the end of the road and Will's house came into view.

At least the car was there. Something in her had been insisting Will would slink away after what happened at the lab. That voice had been telling her that the whole ride over that she

would come upon a cold, empty house. He wasn't injured wildlife, she reminded herself, he was a whole grown man. He'd survived hell, after all.

The dogs came running as she put the car in park and grabbed her backpack, and she felt a pang of grief for the time Will had spent away from his pack, his family.

"Howdy, howdy," she said, greeting the boisterous crowd and leading them to the front steps.

The porch was clean and a bright coat of paint renewed it, the open front door beckoned to her and the dogs.

"Come on in."

Will's voice came from deep inside the house, through the screen door, possibly from the kitchen. He sounded okay, which was a comfort.

The dogs flowed around her legs as she made her way in, dropping her bag in an armchair by the fireplace and heading on through. The windows in the kitchen were open and the breeze moving around the house made it feel more alive than it had in her memory.

Spring. What a relief.

"Don't sit, we're heading out."

The moment the words were out of Will's mouth he remembered to smile. It didn't go over as well as it would have, had it been appropriately timed. He was still working on learning eye contact and proper facial mirroring again, and felt out of his depths.

"Fresh coffee," he added, holding two travel mugs aloft, "with a little whiskey. Grab a doughnut or two. I was thinking we could go for a walk."

That seemed to warm Bev, and she uncrossed her arms to grab a jelly filled donut, speaking after taking a large bite. "Don't mind if I do. Where we headed, boss?"

He relaxed a little and pulled the strap of his camera over his shoulder. "I thought we could take the dogs to the lake, get some shots of the wood ducks in the reeds. Might be Ellie's favorite time of year."

The white cocker spaniel mix perked up at her name and pressed against his knee.

"Is that alright?" he asked sheepishly.

He didn't know why he was so desperate for some sign he wasn't in trouble, some acknowledgement that she was there as his friend, there for him. He swallowed hard and waited for a reply.

"Course'," Beverly replied with a big smile. "I was kinda worried you'd want to get blackout drunk after lunch."

She was being honest, and he was thankful for that.

"Old habits die hard," he agreed, "It was *plan B*, if you weren't up for a walk."

She laughed at his joke and grabbed a glazed donut, and they were out the front door and into the gorgeous afternoon. Winston led the pack of dogs, several feet ahead of the two of them, and Will felt his stride sync up to hers, ease into that primal harmony.

Step after step into the wild, together, with the hounds.

"You in there?" Beverly asked, causing him to remember the camera and ground himself by holding it up to his face.

"Yeah," he sighed, looking at the world through the slightly off angle of the lense, miniaturized, small enough to contain his whole life. "Sorry. Still getting used to talking again. Conversation never was my strong suit."

It was close enough to the truth, and what was weighing on his mind would come up soon enough.

"You're okay, dude," Beverly soothed. "Just checking in. Rough day and all."

They were walking fast enough that he was sure they were outside the range of any listening device Hannibal had hidden in the house, or at the edge of the perimeter. If he had the woods surrounding tapped then that was enough effort that he might as well have his way. The only true safety for what Will loved was measured by the distance between Hannibal's will and their skin.

"This is going to sound crazy," he said, meeting her gaze for the first time solidly, "and hell, maybe it is. But, it's true."

"I'm listening," Bev wagered, watching Will's mouth and then eyes for something he wasn't sure he could produce; some sign of stability, awareness.

"Brian is right," he replied, picking at the edge of the truth like a scab.

"That's something I never would have expected you to say," Bev spat, looking him over quickly. "But for real, he was just talking shit because he wants you off the team! You make him look bad, you make us all look bad."

They crested the hill and a meadow opened up in front of them, gleaming, the dogs making it to a full sprint to frolic like mad. The lake was a few yards off down the hill, and from their stance there was a cloud of insect life indicating where the reeds began.

"He said the Ripper made a mistake by falling in love with me. He's right," he said, kicking rocks along the path's edge.

"Don't wander into what Brian Zeller thinks. There be monsters," Beverly tried, a reasonable stance. A way out of the conversation.

"See the lake?" he asked, stilling to point over the brush and wildflowers.

"Yeah?" Bev agreed, clearly knowing what was coming next.

"That's where he dumped Stammet's vehicle, after he killed him," Will said, stomach tight.

"I don't know if it's a good idea for you to be talking about-" Beverly answered, upset and a little scared.

God, he could see she was scared. He had to focus.

"I'm not relitigating the past, I'm trying to show you what you missed," Will insisted.

"Fucking thanks," Bev bit back without hesitation.

"Just listen."

The dogs rolled around in the open space and he tried not to imagine Beverly's heart beat, the hair on the back of her neck. It would be so easy to slip into her frame of mind. Easier than going forward with his plan.

"Someone planted the evidence of the murder here on purpose," he explained.

"To frame you," Beverly supplied.

"To *test* me," he corrected. "I imagine it was difficult for him at first, the awareness that he cared for me."

"You haven't been talking to the-" Beverly tried, eyes opening, head cocked at a strange angle. In horror, possibly.

"Imagine getting away with all that killing for years, and then you kill someone for someone else's benefit. A creature with little to no empathy, a man unafraid of his God, yours, or mine," he elaborated. "I thought he was trying to frame me first, too. Then there was the swan."

Beverly nodded and his eyes went back to the dogs.

"It was a clear message: A God taking on different guise, the only way to court one sworn to betray them. He wooed me with flowers, protection, his quick wit, but in the end I picked the FBI. I picked the job over him. I failed and there were consequences, as we both know, but he's giving me another chance. I won't mess it up this time."

Beverly just watched the horizon, waiting.

"I don't know that I can catch him," Will admitted.

Beverly's gasp was overtaken by the sounds of ten or so birds leaving the water. They both looked to see ducks taking to the air as the dogs finally approached the shores of the lake.

Will cleared his throat and tried again. "I don't know that I can catch him, but I know I can stop him. Brian was right, falling in love with me was a bad move. Letting me get out of prison will be his ultimate mistake, though. I just need you out of the way when things go down."

"Can't catch him, can stop him? What the hell are you proposing?" Beverly demanded.

Will pulled a square of paper from his back pocket and carefully unfolded it, passing it over and waiting. Beverly read through the first page two times before she moved on, and by the fourth page she was reading the words typed out under her breath.

"Six month trade. Full pay, full benefits…you get to bring your expertise in the field," Will explained, pausing for effect, "to the Anthropology Research Facility at the University of Tennessee. The Body Farm. One of theirs spends the Spring here, with us," he added.

"You applied for this a month ago, with my personal info? You filled all this out in secret to get me out of town?" Bev asked, looking over the papers again in bewilderment.

"I rented you a house in Tennessee to get you out of town," he clarified. "I filled all that out so you'd be happy out of town. I can't risk you, you're the only friend I've got, Bev."

After a deep breath she looked up at him, brows furrowed. He couldn't blink, couldn't look away.

"How many bedrooms?" she asked.

Will laughed a little and handed her another single piece of printed out info. "Three. The program has housing, but it's on campus. I knew you'd be reluctant, so I kinda went all out."

"You sure you can afford this?" Bev asked.

"Can't take it with me," he mused.

"Fuck. You're really doing this aren't you?" she sighed.

They looked together across the sky as a murmuration of starlings wove a pattern through the bright blue expanse.

"If I go," Beverly asked at last, "Am I ever going to see you again?"

The flood of emotion that had been threatening to take him under since he'd received the mail that afternoon hit him full force and he reached out to clumsily take one of her hands.

"No," he whispered.

"Are you-" she began, sounding thoughtful.

Of all the things she could have asked, he wasn't expecting what came out of her mouth.

"Are you taking the dogs where you're going?"

His chest hurt from the intensity of being known and he held back tears as he nodded and sputtered. *"Course'* I'm bringing my damn dogs!"

"Good, good," she murmured, sniffing and wiping at her eyes. She took a deep breath and steadied herself before she continued. "Cause I don't want to come back to town and have to figure out where the hell I'm gonna store them all!"

His system was flooded, his chest seemed to expand with relief, his heart racing, but full. She was safe, she would be safe. As long as she could leave tonight.

"Yeah, well, I've got my bearings now, alright?" he assured her. He let go of her hand and tried to right himself.

"Did you take me all the way out here to tell me about this because your place is bugged?" she asked, looking him over.

"Probably," he admitted.

"Stay safe this time, will ya?"

He sighed and turned the camera back to the landscape. He knew it wasn't what she meant, but out there in the wild, he had to say it.

"I'm not going back to prison."

We will miss you

Chapter Summary

Beverly heads out of town and Will is late for dinner.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who cheered me on! Seeing the kisses in the notes kept me working day after day? 😌✌️😌

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Relief buzzed under Will's skin as he watched Beverly drive off. Out there in the mild breeze, dust in the air, he felt nearly weightless. He held his breath until the bank of the muddy Jeep became a distant speck. Breathe out, breathe in. He focused on the dot until it was gone, getting his breathing under control. He couldn't panic now, when she was so close to being out of the way.

Bev didn't deserve to be murdered. He didn't want her to be collateral damage. She was his friend. The thought of her death haunted him, day in and day out. Terror, hot and acrid. He saw her almost every night when sleep took him; dying at Hannibal's hands. Her slim neck, broken. Her skin, flayed. He knew that she was going to catch on soon, and her face would tell. She deserved much more than a sight on her forehead.

He knew there would be casualties. Of the Ripper. Of his own choices.

Go with a knife tonight. Bury it deeper.

His bloodlust surged and he clenched his whole body tight for a few seconds. He was an animal succumbing to an endurance hunter. Every muscle in his body was burning. Exhausted. Only one thing rang true, after it all: *He wasn't going to go back to prison.*

One of the dogs rubbed up against his leg, leaning their whole weight into him, and he took a steadying breath. The plan had only just started. He needed to keep that in mind. He wouldn't be able to think clearly until Bev was out of harm's way and in the air. Gone. He knew the next step by heart, after planning for this day for months.

His fingers felt numb as he found Hannibal's contact in his phone and dialed the number. One, two, three rings and the line sprang to life.

“Did you change your mind about dinner?” Hannibal asked, voice offering up mirth and affection.

Bastard.

“It’s difficult to pass up the chance to eat at your table,” Will allowed. “Do you mind?”

“Not in the least,” Hannibal replied. “Does five work for you. I know it’s early, but we don’t have to rush the night. I have a whiskey I’ve been meaning to share with you.”

Easy. It was so easy that Will felt nauseous. He went on to agree and thank Hannibal, but as soon as he felt close to free the man cleared his throat.

“You wouldn’t mind running a little errand for me on the way, would you?”

That sugary sweet sensation. That instinct to please, to be *of use.* Will had to take in a long breath before he could reply.

Please, his mind supplied.

Make me, his body begged.

Clenched teeth were the only way he got out of that conversation alive. Mercy. He had an address in downtown and a list of cello accouterments to pick up.

Cat gut strings.

He’ll string you up, alright, some sense in him whispered.

He couldn't tell the difference between premonition and trauma response anymore, but his hackles were raised. He needed a hot shower and a different outfit. His shirt was soaked with sweat. He felt wrung out.

In front of the bathroom mirror, he stared at a version of himself he felt further and further from. If he could get this right, if he could in fact *right* this, he would bridge the gap between the person he was and the person in the mirror.

He was sure of it.

In his office, an hour away in Baltimore, Hannibal set his phone down and stood up straight. He felt ten feet tall. His lung capacity seemed to double. He felt the tick-tick movement of his actions sliding into place.

Chaos.

It was a seed he couldn’t help but plant. It was simply his nature. He looked inward. Arousal, mental and sexual. Triumph. Anticipation. Each one ticked off on a mental list. They were expected feelings, ones he could always manage to snuff out. (They didn't explain the tightness in his abdomen or the little voice whispering *fool.)*

“Walk, Dog?” he offered, needing to get the energy out somehow.

Dog obeyed. The slight thing sprang from its bed under his desk and circled near the back door, where the leash was kept.

Oh, he thought, *for the simple mind of a dog. Simple wants, needs. To be truly fulfilled while being controlled.*

As for controlling, the FBI was a tick on his leg. They were a little too close. It was only a matter of time before their relationship would turn sour.

He wanted to leave. Not to run, he would never run, but to relocate. Europe called to him like a siren. But, no. Whether he liked it or not, the thread of fate had him clearly tied to the whims of a fisherman.

God help him. If he was a fool, he was a fool *in love.*

He hid a smile as he walked in the mild afternoon breeze. The world was lit with a palpable new glow. Budding trees and flowers open to turn eagerly towards the warmth of the Sun. Water droplets caught and redistributed the light. Nature was showing its tenacity, its power in rebirth.

Back in the neighborhoods they were only likely to pass others walking their dogs during their lunch break and yoga moms getting in a quick jog. Neither group bothered Hannibal much, so he could let his mind wander back to Will.

It wasn’t certain death, the errand. He simply wanted to see what would happen if Will met someone who might be a killer. (Murderous ideation, on top of some form of psychosis, he suspected.) It wasn’t sending a weak fawn to a wolf by any means. Will was more likely to suss him out than attack.

Tobias was an unknown.

He'd been introduced at the opera half a dozen times, as they ran in the same circles. For some reason he couldn't remember whether or not he had seen Franklin and Tobias the night everything fell apart.

Tobias would recognize Will as the man accused of being the Chesapeake Ripper. When Will went away his face was on every printed page, every screen. They used the same three photos over and over again; Will's Quantico badge, his driver's license, and a photo taken when he was arrested.

Would Tobias ingratiate himself? Would Will see him the way he had *seen* Hannibal?

There were a million other scenarios out there. Too many to go through, and nothing good to ruminate on. He let Dog lead him down the street for a few more blocks before turning them around and back towards the office.

Margot was scheduled for a session in half an hour. He enjoyed her company most of any of his patients. She was darkly humorous and unabashed in her dilemma.

Her brother was a monster clothed in inheritance law. Margot needed to believe that she could find a way to dethrone him. At that point, however, it was more about keeping her alive.

It was a fruitful day ahead of him, and the trepidation that was constraining his thoughts slowly left his system. After all, he had played his part. It was up to the fates now.

Around four-thirty Hannibal pulled the first half of a northern pike from an ice packed cooler. He'd caught it a few days prior. He had scoped out Deep Creek Lake years prior to deal with a body. He'd headed there for the second time Monday with his rarely used fishing kit and a few live minnows and blood red worms. Northern pikes were fighters, the top of their food chain. The 20 pounder he caught was a beautiful specimen.

The windows were open to the crisp air as he prepped the fish to be baked, and then the side dishes. Dog watched on from a tufted bed in the corner, folded up and nodding off. He blanched the asparagus and snap peas. Started in on the dressing for the burrata salad.

Hannibal poured himself a glass of wine and took in all the smells around him. The kitchen was sweet and savory. From the rest of the house came the scent of peonies, wisteria, and the distant sound of wind chimes. Everything was in place.

Five o'clock came and went. The sun set around six, and with it, any hope that Will was simply running late. When the sounds of a car on the gravel around back came, it was eight o'clock and Hannibal couldn't convince himself it was really Will.

Somewhere between opening the Sancerre, sauv blanc to compliment the forgotten fish, and finishing the bottle, he'd convinced himself Will was dead. The cork was still in his hand as he stood and made his way to the back door.

Through the dimpled glass of the door he saw Will's car, and the man himself emerging, holding a standard bouquet.

"You look like you've seen a ghost!" Will noted as he saw Hannibal's face through the doorway. "Sorry I'm so late. Who's this?"

It wasn't really a surprise to see Hannibal with a Whippet, but Will had assumed he was more the type to own a Doberman.

"This is Dog. Dog, say hello," Hannibal managed, with a bit more composure. He took the bouquet graciously and motioned Will to enter. "I must apologize for my face. I was worried there may have been an accident."

Despite the calm he now exuded, Will was caught by the statement. Something in it was the truth. Or, perhaps, it was the answer to a question not posed. It felt acidic to Will and he maneuvered the waters around the man with more care.

With the flowers in water Hannibal led Will into the kitchen. The little dog scurrying behind, but waiting anxiously at the doorway. Seeing him there, with just his nose and eyes poking around the corner, it hit Will head on.

“Did you find Dog at my place? I mean, on my property?”

Hannibal nodded. “He was hanging around a lot while I was fixing the roof. He was the first to get a bath in your new tub.”

Will tried to imagine Hannibal washing a dog, but it seemed beneath him. “So he let you take him home?”

There was some fissure in the air, some electricity. Will thought if he opened his mouth again he would be able to taste it. Copper, lime.

“I have to ask,” Hannibal insisted in lieu of continuing the conversation. “Did you manage to pick up the things I asked of you?”

Shit. Will’s stomach turned and he swore he could feel his cheeks turning red. Could the look on Hannibal’s face have been disappointment?

“I haven’t told you yet, sorry,” Will spat. “The shop was closed for the day, there was a sign on the door. I was going to call you, you know, to explain, but Jack called before I made it back to the car. Another body from the Organ Harvester. By the time we were done with the scene and Jack was out of my hair I just kind of drove myself here.”

He was aware it sounded like a weak excuse, and he prepared himself for some sort of pushback. Instead, what he saw in Hannibal’s eyes was humor.

“The flowers made the perfect apology,” Hannibal assured him, gently. “Nothing more needed. We are happy to have you, no matter how late.”

It rang true. Will’s heart was hammering away in his chest, but he didn’t see anything beyond a wrinkled suit and bit of relief on Hannibal’s side. Beverly would be in the air in an hour, and then he could relax.

“I hope dinner isn’t ruined,” he prompted, sitting on the high back chair to watch Hannibal examine the fridge. He was handed a small green cooking bowl and a fork.

“Not ruined,” Hannibal replied. “Simply in need of re-arrangement. Try the stone fruit salad with burrata and fresh peas and asparagus. I’ll make us a spread from the fish. Tell me about this new killer.”

This new killer that *kept you from me,* his tone said. Less aggravation, more flirtation. He'd take the change of subject.

"He's in school. Overeager medic or surgeon in training. Young, lots of debt," Will explained. "This isn't a cold killer, it's backroom surgery on demand. We'll catch him."

Hannibal made a disappointed sound and shook his head and Will looked his way. He was always so painfully handsome, even when you knew what he was. What he was.

"Are you jealous?" Will asked, smiling a little when Hannibal choked out a laugh.

"Hardly," Hannibal replied. "Simply worried that you might be nearing boredom. Boredom is a dangerous thing for men like us."

"Like us?" Will snapped, "Don't mistake what I'm capable of for who I am. Where is that whiskey you promised?"

Hannibal pushed a bottle and two cups down the counter to Will and took the salad back from him. Will ignored the way he was being watched as he opened the bottle and took a sniff. It was good, smelled thick and warm. He poured them both four fingers and waited with his glass aloft.

Hannibal recognized the gesture and stopped what he was doing to wipe off his hands. Kitchen towel tossed aside, he stepped into Will's personal space to get the second glass. The smell of his cologne turned Will's anger over into arousal. *Easy.*

"A toast," Will began, "to the danger of boredom."

Hannibal smiled and took a sip from his glass before he moved closer, hand resting on the counter next to Will's. The warmth of his body heat was as inviting as the whiskey.

"You deserve beauty," Hannibal murmured, licking his lips. "Intricate design. Meaning. More than slaughter."

"I don't want another swan," Will said seriously. His heartbeat was a constant thrum.

"What do you want?" Hannibal asked. He set down his glass and pulled Will in by the waist, breathing in against his neck.

"I want everything I've lost," Will allowed, drinking down the rest of his glass.

"Home is the first place we learn to run from," Hannibal said, stepping back to look Will over. "Let me feed you."

Will nodded, throat tight.

Hannibal walked over and opened the fridge again and Will was startled by the buzz of his phone in his pocket. He pulled it out quickly and read the message from Beverly:

Getting on the flight, gonna toss my phone. Do what you have to.

"Everything alright?" Hannibal asked.

Will nodded again, because it might just be.

The last time Beverly had been on a flight was to go to a work thing. (And yes, this was technically a work thing, but it felt like a vacation.) She was more of a train person. Trains moved reliably. There was nothing reliable about flight, in her mind.

"Miss Katz," a young flight attendant said, directing her to the front of the plane after looking at her ticket. "You've been upgraded to first class."

That had never happened before.

"I think there's a mistake," she said, as she was shown to her new seat.

"No mistake," the flight attendant assured her, taking her luggage and securing it quickly. "You also have champagne."

A bottle was presented, and for a moment something in her stomach turned. The note, taped to the neck of the bottle with a dried flower mini-bouquet, read simply:

We will miss you,

Hannibal Lecter

Chapter End Notes

Will: I finally tricked The Ripper 🤫

Hannibal, in the background: I always let him think he tricked me. Sweet boy. ☺

Right on the Edge

Chapter Summary

Will lets himself fall for Hannibal again, while Hannibal insists they have a future.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Home is the first place we learn to run from," Hannibal said. Then, a prayer for the future, "Let me feed you."

Will nodded, but his body remained a cluster of rigid lines. There were surely internal signals going off in his mind. *Danger.* Hannibal wondered if those signals had always been there whenever they drew close. It was tempting to focus on the past, on their beginnings, but he needed to be present. He didn't know how many chances he had left. The word *flighty* came to mind.

He focused back on the food. The fish he'd baked perfectly earlier, generously forked away from the bones and tossed in a bowl with pickle relish, mustard, homemade mayonnaise and capers. He was getting ready to slice up the bread he'd baked earlier that day when he heard Will receive a text message.

"Everything alright?" he asked.

He saw the relief battle with hours of tension in Will's shoulders. Like a paper lantern collapsing in on itself.

Will nodded and stuck his phone back in his pocket. He didn't seem to have control over his voice. Hannibal picked up the serrated bread knife and walked with it displayed ahead of him, face open. He didn't want to scare Will.

"Would you mind slicing up the bread for us? Half-inch thick."

Both their eyes fell on the knife between them, it seemed an almost holy transfer. An agreement. A leap of faith. After a long moment Will took the knife by the handle.

Finally, Hannibal could breathe again. His eyelashes fluttered as he took in the familiar scent of Will's skin under oatmeal soap and the new cologne he had taken to wearing. They worked together side by side as they had so many times before. No blood was spilled. Peace was agreed on.

"Are you smelling me?" Will accused.

"Your new aftershave is better than the previous one," he admitted, unabashed.

"It's a three-in-one," Will explained.

Hannibal didn't exactly get the joke.

"Would you be surprised to learn I caught this Northern Pike for us myself?" he deflected, peacocking.

"Did you use live bait?"

They were finally falling into their old rhythm.

"Of course," Hannibal returned with a smile. "I always vote on the side of live bait if I have the option. Minnow. They're beautiful fish in their own right, but they wouldn't make for supper."

"Fish," Will replied with a low hum, speculating. "An easy way to get around the elephant in the kitchen, or an attempt to ingratiate?"

Hannibal handed the promised bottle of whiskey to Will, along with two glasses, and cleared his throat. He held onto the neck of the whiskey bottle for a moment to catch Will's eye. Will was stunning, elemental.

"A flirtation, you frightened thing," he whispered, his mind flitting back to the night at that motel. Wild eyes, arousal just below the hum of violent retribution. "Come and eat."

Will rolled his eyes, but followed to the sitting room. Dog came with them, and skittered to a tufted bed next to the fireplace to settle in with a sigh. It was a scene of comfort and luxury. It was a promise of a possible compromise, a mixing of families. Hannibal hoped Will could see that.

Will sat facing the fireplace and Hannibal opened the windows up to the night. The fireplace had several large candles in the hearth already lit, burned quite a bit down in the meantime, the brown sugar and warm musk thick in the air. It almost overtook the paper whites and lilies that were growing in clear glass bulb-forcing jars in the windowsills.

Fresh air drew over them, teasing at the candles. The air was crisp and the bullfrogs and crickets sang a symphony through it. Hannibal lost himself in it all for a moment.

"Have you already started the bottle tonight?" Will asked, pouring himself a few fingers of the whiskey. "I can tell when you've been drinking."

"I admit," Hannibal began, "I had a bottle of white before you arrived. I would have saved you a glass had I not been convinced our evening together was for naught."

The tension rose for a long second until Will sighed and sat back.

"I should have sent you a text," Will said, losing an inch in height as his shoulders slumped in defeat. "I'm still trying to figure out how I'm supposed to live this…recovered version of my

life. I would rather have been here than in a random alley looking at another mistake in the form of a dead twenty-something. I'm not sure what I want my priorities to be anymore."

His statement was punctuated by him tossing back the whiskey and pouring himself another.

"Why not reinvent?" Hannibal asked, taking the second glass and holding it out so Will could pour him a few fingers.

"Could *you* reinvent?" Will asked after he'd stopped up the whiskey and started in on the food.

Hannibal took him in; rumpled and sleep deprived, licking his fingers, eager for conversation and good food. Everything he had craved from their previous life together.

The muscles in his arms and legs tensed. A sudden instinct to grab Will and crush him with his entire weight. Focus. He set his drink down on the hearth and took a seat next to Will instead. For a moment he couldn't speak. He cleared his throat and tried again.

"For you?" He replied, his heart in his throat. "Without question."

Will's frame didn't change but he went back to eating after a long pause. It wasn't the reaction Hannibal had been hoping for, but Will often needed time to process his emotions. If Hannibal kept still, he knew things would unfold. Until then, he was a gorgeous man who always looked more-so when pensive.

"You've been in my dreams a lot lately" Will said quietly.

There it was, the thorn in his side.

"Dreams or *nightmares?"* Hannibal asked, eyes falling to the candles, the walls around them stained black with soot. There were shadows in Will's mind that he put there. What remained of them in Will's subconscious seemed to be cresting.

"Nightmares," Will admitted. "My mind seems intent on reminding me of what you're capable of."

"Violence?" Hannibal asked.

"Total domination," Will clarified. He took a second to look over and catch Hannibal's eye.

It wasn't the least bit accusatory. Instead it was said with respect and awe, tempered with the sense that Will would feel the same way about a dangerous dog. Still, what a revelation it was to be fully seen and still wanted.

"If I remember, you are no stranger to acts of domination," Hannibal murmured, running his tongue over his front teeth. "You're not a newborn lamb, Will. You are my equal. Don't hold on to the internal image you kept of yourself before. Allow yourself to change. Adapt."

Will drew in a sharp breath and let it out in a beautiful stuttering laugh. He shook his head and went back to eating.

“You’re trying to put a spell on me,” he said, between bites. “Just tell me what you want.”

Beautiful man.

Adrenaline and arousal pulsed through Hannibal's veins, narrowing his senses to Will alone. His internal monologue was begging.

Tell him the truth. Tell him the truth. Tell him the-

"Don't deny yourself the bruising of my skin; how eagerly I'll bleed for you. Haven't you always wanted to hold the darkness back?” he asked.

The space between them was magnetic. Will swallowed hard, but didn’t look away.

"Would that *save* me from the darkness?" Will asked. "No! No, don't say anything. Forget I said that."

“Am I not displaying domesticity well enough?” Hannibal asked, pulling his upper lip back to show his teeth. He was compromising after all. That was the truth. “I know you aren’t afraid of hurting me. Are you worried that it might just feel good enough to continue indefinitely?"

"That isn't something we can keep up," Will said, a small shake to his head. His voice was small. "You're barely healed."

"It isn't something an FBI agent and a prominent psychiatrist can keep up," Hannibal allowed. "Two men, though? Compromises can be made. A certain kind of balance can be found."

Hannibal could feel his heartbeat in his throat, his mouth.

"Are you asking me to run away with you again, Doctor Lecter?" Will asked, eyelashes fluttering closed.

Hannibal clicked his tongue and Will's eyes were back on him.

"I'm not asking as a doctor. I'm asking as a man. Don't answer now, just allow it to settle in. There can be another life."

"Yeah, yeah," Will laughed, setting the food and drink aside and shifting to fully take Hannibal in. "A spell. Like I said."

"Come to bed with me," Hannibal pressed, setting his own drink aside so he could take Will's face in his hands. He brushed the stubble along Will's jaw with his thumbs, catching and dragging the hairs the wrong way. "Let me show you what could be."

"Wow," Will laughed, eyes glittering. "I mean yes. Of course. Yes."

Undressing with Hannibal was a heady experience. Even now, with a few more scars, the man was unflinchingly beautiful. It felt as new as the first time. *Fuck,* he was in over his head.

"Is it healing well?" he asked, reasserting himself.

Hannibal's hand went up to the gauze and the look he gave Will was enough to leave him gasping for air. A flash of something visceral, feral. Will wondered if his eyes would reflect red, remembering his doppelganger crouching in the night. The small hairs on the back of his neck stood up, his cock throbbed.

"Looking for a reason to go easy on me?" Hannibal asked, folding the last of his clothes and striding with confidence to the bed.

Will tossed aside his socks and let the whiskey take over. His body felt alive in a way it hadn't in a long time, easy with warmth. *As long as he wasn't killing someone with Hannibal, he wasn't really doing much wrong.*

Jesus, what a grim thought.

"Where have you gone?" Hannibal purred, pulling Will into a naked embrace on the bed and looking into his eyes.

"Tell me about the after," Will insisted, latent fear and arousal brewing in him.

Hannibal hummed and embraced him fully, letting Will tuck his face into the crook of his neck and close his eyes. He tasted the skin there.

"We can go anywhere in the world," Hannibal began, his voice resonating through both of their chests. "Ideally, we look for land just outside a mid-sized city center. A large enough house for your dogs and my hobbies."

"Your hobbies," Will echoed.

"What I'm capable of," Hannibal replied, wrapping a leg around Will's thigh and rolling his hips.

And fuck, if that wasn't getting him off, getting them both off. The last thing he should do was play into it.

"Total domination," Will said, stupidly, his head spinning.

Hannibal was laughing, and Will leaned back to look at his mouth, the only thing about him that seemed dangerous at all in the small space between them. He watched Hannibal's mouth as he spat into his hand a few times, as his hand gripped his cock gave it a few quick strokes.

He meant to watch Hannibal's mouth the whole time, but then they were kissing like starved men. *God,* how long had it been since he tasted Hannibal's tongue? He felt made for it. So good, so chemically overwhelming. He let them rut together like teenagers.

When he finally became impatient enough, Hannibal rolled them until he was fully on his back. He offered himself up, legs spread. Will drew in a long stuttering breath and took him dry.

Looking down at Hannibal, pushing the head of his cock into him, into the most dangerous man he'd ever met. It was pure bliss. Hannibal groaned and tightened a hand in Will's hair, locking eyes with him, pain and lust right there.

"I know," Will said, rocking his hips until he could snap into Hannibal's clenching heat with more ease, "I know you won't stop. I know."

Hannibal's mouth opened wide, like he was going to protest, so Will let go of himself completely. He gripped Hannibal's throat with his right hand and pressed him into the bed by the shoulder with his other. Hannibal's lip curled back and Will spat into his mouth. Hannibal's eyes rolled back in his head.

"Shhh," Will whispered. "I know. I know."

Hannibal started to grunt, to tighten around Will's cock as he lost oxygen. The whites of his eyes felt like a victory. For a few long seconds Will fucked into him with abandon and budding horror. He watched as those eyelids fluttered closed.

He could kill him *right now.* He could do it. He would have to choose it, but he was suddenly sure Hannibal would let him.

Then, like a hail Mary, he was coming. One, two, three deep thrusts and his hands loosened, body fucked out. He let himself fall back into Hannibal's embrace. It felt right.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal: I'm down for a hate fuck

Will: Best I can do is flirt with you

Hannibal: JACKPOT

Will: FLIRT WITH YOU

Hannibal: wheeeeeeeze

Will, strangling him: FLIRT

I Want To Run Away

Chapter Summary

> Will opens up a bit to a real therapist, and then we see him through the eyes of our old friend Freddie.

A week had passed since Beverly left. A week since Will slept with Hannibal and lost himself to the drug of *being seen* again *,* and he felt the withdrawal as he walked through the halls of the school on his way out of the lab. He missed these halls, he realized, only for the reliable mornings with Hannibal.

He'd started his day with black coffee, a glass of Ovaltine, and a corpse. It occurred to him that the slight discomfort might be hushed by a packet of vending machine crackers. His father always said he ate like a bird. He wasn't hungry for anything these days.

Instead of giving into it and running out the door to Hannibal's on his way home (a multi-hour detour) he did something he'd been putting off and stopped halfway down the last hall.

"You busy?" He asked, leaning into Dr. Theo Wrenald's open door.

His therapist, State mandated, glanced up at the clock on the wall and then urged him into the cramped office.

"Something on your mind?" Theo asked, moving the papers around on his desk and getting a freshly shaved pencil to take notes with. His flexibility was revered among the lab staff.

"People stare at me in the streets," Will said, as he sat in a familiar seat. "I noticed it the first day I was out, but I thought I would get used to it."

A side effect of infamy is a loss of anonymity. There was just so much damned loss.

He glanced up at Theo and tried to focus on a point just beyond his shoulder. A colorful print of the surf and sun on the far wall. He tasted salt on the back of his tongue.

"What do you worry they're thinking, Will?" Theo asked.

Will sighed and rubbed at the bridge of his nose before answering. He needed a second to reign in his anger.

"What do I *worry* they're thinking?" he parroted. He tried to collect himself. He should have expected softball questions. *Still.* "Little old ladies cross the street when they see me. They think I'm dangerous."

"Do you pose a danger to anyone, or yourself, Will?" Dr. Wrenald asked, posing the question as gently as possible.

Will snorted and relaxed a bit. From a life spent avoiding psychiatric evaluation to that question being asked of him every week or so. Trying to tease something out. Loss on top of loss.

"No," he replied. "They took away my handgun, anyhow."

Theo didn't seem amused, he just wrinkled his nose and wrote down a few secret words in his notebook. Will was finally able to take in the whole of the room. It was comforting, cramped, and the Maritime theme was pleasing. He'd had speech therapists throughout his early school years with similar offices. He tried to feel a sense of safety, at least in the knowledge that what he said there wouldn't leave the room.

"How does it make you feel, to be perceived as something you are not?" Theo asked, his voice breaking through Will's thoughts.

He crumpled back into the chair for a moment, folding in on himself like a piece of paper. He was caving, or on the edge of it. He pointed to the door, received a nod, and escaped the question for the time being.

The coffee machine was just outside the door, a holdover from before the renovation. It was a behemoth, dented aluminum sides, chipped brown. It cost $1.20 for a coffee, and wouldn't take nickels or pennies. He had enough change in his pocket to make it a mocha.

With a door between himself and the searching eyes of his therapist, Will was able to think about his answer. The little paper cup dropped down and was filled with steaming coffee mixture from a nozzle above. When it hissed to a stop he reentered the office with his answer.

"I feel like I want to leave the State, leave the East Coast completely," he said as he sat back across from Theo. "With my pension, and what I have saved up, I can afford a piece of land with a cabin. I just want to follow some river, fix boats for cash."

He could hear the scratching of the therapist's pen on his notebook and felt a fresh wave of shame.

"Would you tell us if you were leaving?" came the next question.

Will held the coffee up to his lips, wincing at the heat of it through the paper cup, and took a sip. After a deep breath, he met Theo's eyes and lied easily.

"I'll have to have my checks sent somewhere, won't I? Can't trust the forwarding system with money or meds, am I right?"

The coffee burned his tongue and tasted like shit, but it gave him something to focus on as his act lay in limbo. After a long moment his prayers seemed answered as the topic changed.

"How are your eating habits? Are you getting enough calories?"

“Yeah, yeah. I’m eating," Will said, with relief. He offered a small admission. "Probably not enough.”

“Can you reach out to someone in your support network? Sometimes all we need is a little encouragement.”

“Bev is out of town,” he said, letting his eyes fall back to the stained rug.

“She isn’t your only friend,” the therapist pressed.

"I don't trust anyone else enough at this point. I still can’t get over the fact that they all thought I was some sort of secret serial killer,” Will shot back with frustration. "I don't know if I should take it as a compliment that they thought I could manage to fuck up more than just my own life."

The silence in the room was a heavy thing. Will felt adrift for a moment. He wanted to close his eyes, he wanted to just disappear.

“You said previously that the person who framed you was competent," Theo said. "Can you imagine what you would have thought if he’d framed one of your colleagues?”

He could.

“To be fair, I was dealing with an inflamed brain at the time,” Will said, unwilling to answer.

“Could he have tricked you?”

“He did," Will said flatly.

“Can you find it in yourself to forgive *all* of the victims of his crimes, including yourself?” Theo asked.

Unbelievable. This man had no idea of *his life,* of what *he* had *done,* what he'd *allowed.* Spoken like the clergy. Forgive and forget, as though one ever could.

"I think this is a good time to break," Theo amended. "We'll break for the week on the topic of forgiveness. Treat yourself gently this week, Will, you've been through a lot."

And then, *thank god,* he was out the door.

Freddie Lounds sat in her car, frowning at the taste of her seven dollar espresso. She should have enjoyed it when it was hot, but she'd been trying to use it as a little incentive to follow Will Graham around for another day. That was an hour ago, when she'd parked at the FBI academy at Quantico to wait for him. Now the drink was room temperature and separated, bitter.

That was beside the point, she reminded herself, tossing the rest back and turning her car on. Will was on the move, and she had to tail him.

The last week had been all flowers and lovey-dovey intimate meetings between Will and *the Doctor.* Documenting their little love affair would have been a waste of time, if she didn't believe it would commence in another dead body.

She scowled at the blossoming flowers along the parking lot and controlled the steering wheel with her knee as she dispensed allergy eye drops to each eye. Even the remedy stung like a bitch.

Spring always works out for everyone but little Freddie, she thought, a saying her father came up with when she was little.

As Will made his way onto the I-95 Express she let her mind drift back to the photos she'd most recently developed. In the red lights of the shared darkroom she had felt transported in time. Hannibal, stepping out of his expensive car wearing a fashionable turtleneck and smoking a secretive cigarette. Then another turtleneck, and another.

She'd come to the only conclusion that rang true: makeup sex with a killer was kinky.

"Mary, Mother of Christ," she said, under her breath.

She fumbled with her cellphone for a bit before it started playing where she'd last left off on her current audiobook, and dropped it into the cup-holder.

"Sarah packed up her things, thinking that the answer to all her problems was to leave this damned city-" the narrator began.

She was able to focus on the story, and after a little under an hour she followed Will's car off the Expressway and onto Route 3. She pulled up her phone's map program as they drove through Chancellorsville and Lake Wilderness to Locust Grove.

As Will slowed down to turn off Constitution Highway onto Zoar Road, Freddie saw a sign for Witch's Brew Café. She promised herself there and then that no matter what kind of scoop she got out of the day she would stop for a *real* decent cup of coffee and a scone on her way home.

They drove past one church, and a whole lot of nothing but personal driveways and woods, her little car always just catching sight of Will before the distance stole him away again. She finally saw the dust settling where he'd turned off the main road. It was a small church with an attached cemetery bearing the name of the road and surrounding area; Zoar.

She managed to park across the street and turn off her car to do a little digging on her phone. A few searches and the truth slapped her in the face.

Across the street, just beyond a few pines, the cemetery that held the remains of Matthew Brown, former staff nurse at the BSHCI, lay barren and unremarkable. Freddie couldn't imagine disappearing from the face of the Earth the way Brown had. They hadn't even held a funeral for him, just into the ground.

She put her phone away and got her camera, looking across the street for a place she could hide from view. It was a sad piece of land with a patchy perimeter, so there was really only one place that would work. She closed up her car and jogged over.

Will was still in his car, sitting behind the wheel. The clarity of his silhouette in the sunlight, even without the telephoto lens, made her skin crawl. She knelt in the tree line and felt the first real pangs of regret as his head fell forward and she could tell he'd begun to cry.

She averted her eyes and instead focused on her camera. She needed to put a little mental distance between herself and her subject. Distance and time for decency. She decided that she wouldn't take pictures of him crying if he finished by the time she had the camera warmed up. After a few shots of leaves and gravestones to get a feel for the distance, she gave up waiting and zoomed in.

Will Graham, in the driver's seat, holding a knife.

Her heart sped up as she took shot after shot, unsure if she was about to witness a suicide.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

Six more seconds, six more photos, and he was exiting the car alive.

Relief shot through Freddie, but she reminded herself that with Will Graham, trouble was only around the corner.

She continued to follow Will with her camera as he walked to a grave marker, and then another. At first, she couldn't see the knife, but as he seemed to settle before a final gravestone his right hand came out of his jacket and the knife was placed on the stone. She swore she caught it glinting in the sun!

She couldn't have dreamed up a better story than what was unfolding before her. Whatever kind of threesome these men had been involved in, now only two remained. The question was whether Hannibal Lecter would allow another person to ever get that close to Will again.

Matthew Brown. That poor boy had had it coming. As Will turned from the grave and walked back to his car, all Freddie could think was that it was almost, *almost,* romantic.

Eyes On Me

Chapter Summary

Freddie starts writing her newest story and Jack gives Will a scare.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Freddie Lounds thought she had the last eye on Will Graham as he drove away from the graveyard. She stood her ground for a few more moments, shaded from view in the tree line. She'd taken enough photos for the article, and she was working on an angle in her head. Excitement spurred her on, but the sense of self-satisfaction popped like a balloon as she turned back to the grave and saw a man approaching it.

She'd planned on snatching the knife once she was alone. She wanted to know where it came from. Beyond that, she wanted to keep it as a souvenir. There were quite a few things she had wanted to do when she thought she was alone.

Walking towards the older man in a Mechanic's jumpsuit, her heels pressed into the ground. She tried to gain back her grave before he looked up He pushed a rolling trash can and was already at the grave, hand reaching out for the knife.

"Sir!" she shouted, making her way to the edge of the main plot and straightening her outfit.

A blue-gloved hand faltered. The old man looked up. There was an odd quiet between them, only the birds breaking it with their impatient hungry calls. She prayed to whichever God was listening that this wasn't a mute-for-the-Lord sort of ordeal.

"Please, my brother is sick, he didn't mean to leave that there. It's a compulsion. It's only my family's cutlery. One place he leaves a spoon, today it's my father's knife!"

She tried to balance her exasperation with sugary-sweet familial affection. Maybe a hint of shame. The doting younger sister. It was as good an excuse as she could think up last minute.

"Sorry, ma'am," the man finally replied, "there's a protocol for dangerous items on the grounds. If you want to have your brother fill out a retrieval request, we can get it back to you in about a week."

Stubborn. And not mute. His fingers grasped the knife handle, placing it like a dead animal in a ziplock bag. Her time was running out.

"He would be so *embarrassed.* Is there anything I could do to expedite the process?" She pleaded, opening her bag and pulling out her wallet as a last resort. "A donation to the

church, perhaps?"

The man looked aghast. "Are you trying to bribe me?"

He glanced back and forth along the treeline as if she'd brought a video crew. She knew she'd lost.

"You would do this in front of God? On *hallowed* ground?" he further accused.

She tried to push a few folded hundreds into his hand, but he quickly retreated with his cart, knife on board, back to the edge of the graveyard. She sighed at the loss, and turned to leave.

Disappointment aside, the outcome of the morning's work was pretty damn good. She'd go over the photos at that little cafe she'd passed, and she might even quote the gravekeeper.

"On hallowed ground," she mimicked, trudging back through the drenched sod towards the street.

Hidden in the grave keeper's cabin, due south of the church, a second man looked on. Jack Crawford, of the venerable FBI, shook his head at Freddie's shrinking silhouette. He had to hand it to her, the woman had tenacity. In another world she would have made a decent agent.

He watched her leave the graveyard on a pixelated black and white monitor. The second she crossed the road to get in her car he picked up his phone. He sent a text to Will.

Want to explain the knife?

He waited for a reply to the text, closed up the monitor and moved over as the grave keeper opened the door to the cabin. He was a quiet man, and maneuvered his metal garbage cart into its place in the entry without a word. As he went to remove his gloves and wash his hands Jack got a text from Will.

What the fuck Jack?? Are you following me?

It wasn't the answer he was looking for, but he did relish having the upper hand. He smiled to himself and took the knife from the gravekeeper before typing out an answer.

You put the visit in your WORK calendar. Are you trying to tell us something, Will? Should I be worried about you?

He turned the knife over in his hand, viewing it from different angles. It was beautiful, even stuffed in a ziplock bag as it was.

"What did she say to you?" he finally asked.

"The redhead?" the gravekeeper asked. "Tried to tell me that your agent there was her brother. Said he has a problem in his head."

"She's crafty," Jack chuckled. "Pretends to be a reporter for a living, if you can believe that."

No further response came from Will, so Jack thanked the gravekeeper for his help and walked out to his SUV. He supposed he would talk to Will in person when they both made it back to the lab. He had a sick feeling Hannibal had something to do with this.

He gave the knife one more glance, resting on his passenger seat. *Just another weapon, left behind by a possible killer.* He shook his head, and started the vehicle. The usual suspects. He felt like a fool.

Spring was evident in the fresh bouquets placed around the room, the breeze coming through the open windows, and the fact that Hannibal was down to his shirtsleeves at his desk.

He watched a red dot move along his laptop screen, a little pulsing light representing Will's car. He'd placed the tracker on Will's car ages ago and had been surprised to find it still active when he signed in to track Freddie Lounds' vehicle that morning.

Fate seemed to be pulling strings when they both ended up in the parking lot of the Academy that same morning. She was tailing Will, but not as well as he was. Now miles away at his office, he watched them part ways. Will was surely going back to work.

The grandfather clock in his office gave Hannibal something to focus on as he switched tabs and looked at a similar map. The red dot that represented Freddie Lounds' vehicle remained stationary at a strip mall near the main road's end, just a few minutes away from the graveyard. That was one less thing for him to worry about, he supposed.

He was only halfway through his day at work, but this occurrence, this meeting of the minds as it were, had him itching to leave. He knew who was buried in Zoar, and he noted internally what that knowledge made him feel.

RED HOT RAGE.

And on a pale horse beside it: Jealousy, raising its head.

"Jealous of a dead man?" he asked himself aloud, again feeling disbelief, "A dead child?"

JUDAS ISCARIOT: WHO BUILT FOR YOU A CROSS.

"Nothing but a boy," he reassured himself.

Matthew Brown had a certain unhinged quality that was bred out of a family dog, disqualifying in a herding breed. His desperation was wide-eyed and electric. Hannibal understood what Will saw in him. A new disciple, a fresh start, an eager lover.

It really had been a missed opportunity, he thought, that they'd never been allowed hand-to-hand combat. It would have been beautiful to feel Matthew's bones crack and joints dislocate, to push until his body took up a new shape, hue. Show him how hollow his earthly vessel truly was.

The bear gun had been a compliment of sorts, but the knife wounds were not. He let his thumb slide under his cuff, running back and forth over the scar. For a moment, he was lost in

the sensation, the disgust and anger.

His laptop refreshed and Freddie's red dot started to move again. He went to the home page for her little *newsletter* and read the latest update.

'Sneak Peek: FBI agent caught in satanic ritual at grave of former lover?'

In the middle of the page was a photo, zoomed in and grainy, of *his* Maple burl oyster knife. The previous bit of rage burned anew, fire licking through the cracks in his mind.

"I'm going to eat her," he whispered.

There was a knock from the mailman at the door, and he slammed the laptop shut, muscles in his arms twitching and hands curling into fists.

"Coming," he shouted, standing from his desk and feeling light-headed. "On my way."

Will arrived back on campus in a terrible mood; the words he'd said to his therapist just hours before banging around in his head. It made him furious that he couldn't even go to a graveyard by himself anymore. It felt like the illusion of freedom was just that, and he was now always going to be considered suspicious. He *hated* his job, and he *hated* Jack, and he *hated* Quantico, and the only thing he wanted to do was bitch to someone about it.

He parked in his spot and fished his phone out of his pocket, opening the text app up and then closing it again. He wanted to hear Hannibal's voice. The phone rang twice before the line clicked to life.

"Will?" Hannibal asked, sounding a bit like he was out of breath.

"Yeah, hey," Will replied, suddenly unsure, his foot tapping out a sloppy SOS.

"Is everything alright?" Hannibal asked after a few painful moments.

"I just," Will began, throat closing for a second on the truth, "I just hate this place, you know?"

"Has Jack done something?" Hannibal asked. "His interest in you, in what you do…you know it's always been self serving. "

Will hummed out a weak sound and nodded; of course Hannibal understood.

"You wouldn't believe the lengths he's going to just to remind me he's in charge," Will added. "The man is *obsessive.* I don't know how *you* put up with him for so long."

It felt good to let it out. He closed his eyes and waited.

"I've been thinking of making you a Court-bouillon," Hannibal said at last.

Will's interest was piqued. Growing up in Louisiana, he was more likely to get Court-bouillon prescribed for a cold than chicken soup. It was a soup base he found bubbling in every kitchen where he'd grown up. He'd had it so many different ways: beef, chicken, fish, and poached eggs. It was a taste of home, which made him realize Hannibal was flirting.

"You can't be serious," he said, grinning, feeling his cheeks flush. "Fish or-"

"Let it be a surprise," Hannibal insisted, cutting him off. "Strawberries and cream for dessert. And plenty of cold beer."

Flirting.

"I'll be home by 4." Will was already thinking about leaving work early. "When can you come over?"

"I'll see you then," Hannibal agreed.

"Yeah?" Will asked, relieved. "God, something to look forward to. Okay. I'm gonna head to the lab now. Talk to you soon."

It left him smiling to himself in his car. He felt a bit manic, like he could cry or scream. Strawberries for dessert: but only after a few hours *underground.* The fucking lab.

When it came to the current case, he didn't really care. He tried to feel bad about that, but the organ harvester was only racing time. He was a second-rate killer, butchering the kinds of people desperate enough to sell an organ. The same fucking story, over and over again.

He stopped on the way to the lab to get coffee and wished Hannibal was still making him donuts and scones five days a week. He ached a little, letting himself reminisce over how ignorant he'd been at the time. Ignorant of Hannibal's intentions, his own. Under the food and flattery.

The fact of it was that they were wrong in complementary ways. He'd always wanted to hurt Hannibal, and Hannibal had apparently wanted to be hurt *by* him. That was a newly accepted part of their relationship, but no one would deny it had been there from the start.

There was an attraction, like none other he'd felt. Like a dead animal on the side of the road, he wanted to get a stick and poke at what Hannibal hid inside. A grotesque curiosity he felt like a callus.

He nearly tripped, taking the corner too quickly for the stairs, and lost some coffee on the way. Right down the front of his shirt. For fuck's sake.

"Slow down, hot shot," Brian said, joining in at the worst time.

They descended the stairs side by side and Will imagined himself once again as a diver, leaving the sight of the sun to breathe recycled air underground. He could do an hour before he'd need to go back up. An hour at most.

"Are you the reason Beverly left for the season?" Brian asked.

"Do we have a new body?" Will replied, trying to sound uninterested as he clenched his jaw.

"You know what?" Brian said, stopping Will with a hand to his chest. "We never found your last shrink. Do you know where your boyfriend buried him?"

"I can arrange a personal tour if you don't shut the fuck up about it." Will pushed past him with a firm shoulder. He was over the idiot's bravado.

His words sounded confident enough, but his teeth were still chattering a bit. Can't waste words on borrowed air, he thought. At the lab he was relieved to find a few people already talking over a body. As usual, he just gritted his teeth and tried to fit in.

More and more, he didn't.

Chapter End Notes

Oh Will, you're gaming for the long game!!!

Forgiveness

Chapter Summary

Hannibal cleans up his most recent mess and goes to Will's early, planning on cooking AND turning up the temperature. He has some time to himself, and lets off some steam. 🚂😤♨️

Chapter Notes

The heart wants what the heart wants, am I right Fellas?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal watched himself in a full length mirror, his reflection looking right through him, hair out of control, and cheeks speckled with blood. The phone seemed fragile in the reflection of his hand; he had to pull himself back from the brink of something. He wiped his face clean and washed his hands.

He took a deep breath and reminded himself to not make the mistake of projecting so much of his irritation on any one man. Jack Crawford's particular kind of micro-management was necessary to shake loose any last notion Will had that he could feel at home on that campus. He was a *tool.* That would be a waste of his energy on such a promising day.

"Fish or-" Will started to ask, voice clear through the phone.

Sly dog. Brilliant man. Either way, he wasn't saying no to the possibility…

"Let it be a surprise," Hannibal insisted. "Strawberries and cream for dessert. And plenty of cold beer."

"I'll be home by 4." Will said, unable to hide his eagerness. "When can you come over?"

"I'll see you then," Hannibal allowed vaguely. He was already locking his office up and getting into his car, the body of his mailman heavy in the trunk. He was headed for Will's, right after he rendered the meat in his own basement.

"Yeah?" Will asked, sounding relieved. "God, something to look forward to. Okay. I'm gonna head to the lab now. Talk to you soon."

GOD. *GOD. NO SWEETER WORD.*

Hannibal started the ignition and said his goodbyes, then set his phone down on the passenger seat and released the brake. Dog whimpered and got ready for the drive, curling into the dog bed and looking nervously out the window. Hannibal watched him as they left the gravel and his pavement, cooing gently and smiling at the creature's queer nature.

His eyes were back on the road as he left the business area and drove through the sunshine dappled tunnel of mature Magnolia Virginianas, the Virginia tulip tree, and into the bright light of the afternoon.

Unable to sit alone with his thoughts, and Dog not needing his attention anymore, he turned the local classic station on and cranked up the volume, pulling onto the freeway entrance and picking up speed.

The clock blinked out the time: 2:22. Internally, this seemed to have a *pleasing* reaction, nodding towards an invisible symmetry. Some slick and sugary fantasy was calling to him. All he could do was resist. He had to get home and start the preparations, after all, if he was to have any time at Will's home to enjoy himself alone.

It took Hannibal less than an hour to remove his victim's thymus gland and pancreas, and store the rest of him in deep freeze to saw up later. He did it all in bracing silence. Dog followed along, then hovered on the toilet seat as he showered, and then back into the dressing room once he was dry. His shadow. He hardly remembered life without the slight thing.

"All we have to do now is prepare for transit. Would you like to spend the evening with the other dogs? Shall we bring your bed?"

Dog stayed near as he packed up the fresh ingredients for dinner and dessert, and the beer he'd been fermenting and conditioning for Will over the last month. In the back seat Dog settled into his bed and the garment bag was clipped to the headrest. Hannibal looked over the backyard once more, a habit before leaving, and got into the driver's seat.

On some level he was willing to admit that this had to go perfectly. That dinner and dessert, that the entire night, hinged on Will's reaction to his jealousy. If he didn't show enough care in the ambiance, in the setting, his demeanor alone could push Will away. All of this precariousness, all of it because of Matthew.

"The knife was mine," he mumbled to himself as the residential area traffic made way for the freeway entrance. "It was a good knife."

If the photo of the knife hadn't ended up online, he may have been able to let it go. For some reason, the fact that he could see it there on the gravestone, and that others could, just wouldn't sit still in him. It wasn't often that he was brought up publicly in a bad light. He felt a stab in his chest remembering Alana's comments about his last brush with bad publicity.

"Lokh."

The Russian slipping from his lips was a surprise. It seemed that he wasn't doing as well as he thought.

He wanted to call Bedelia, but she hadn't picked up the last call he'd made, when she landed overseas. He wasn't even sure it was the right number. Why couldn't she understand that he *needed* to talk to someone? *Well, someone who would keep quiet.*

He thought about finding a therapist out of State. He could tell them he was having marriage problems. *No. No new people,* he reminded himself. He was slipping out of control, and he could feel it. He just needed to see Will.

It was after three o'clock by the time Hannibal had settled into Will's kitchen and gotten the Court bouillon and prep far enough along that he would allow himself a break. The house smelled of onion and garlic, fresh celery and meat stock. He added the cubed tomato and bay leaves and left it to simmer. The dogs were settled together in the living room, well into the afternoon nap he'd induced with deer meat and dehydrated rabbit feet.

Dog looked up at him as he entered the living room and started up the stairs. He gave a quick shake of the head and continued up alone.

He wanted to stand in the room where he'd changed Abel Gideon. To reminisce over his own power, to relish the proximity to Will's everyday life. His *judgment* ruled over this house. It lifted just a bit of the jealousy he'd been feeling. The room looked different filled with camping gear and garden miscellany. Someday it would be *their* miscellany.

He breathed in the smell of the room once more and headed back down the stairs for a short bath. His skin felt tacky even though he'd showered recently. Still sweating out the kill, he could smell copper on his hands and taste it. In the main bathroom on the first floor, he stared at himself in the mirror. He lifted his chin. Looked for something in the reflection. He was doing a lot of that lately.

He opened the cabinet and found the medical kit below the bathroom sink. It had a pair of round-tipped tweezers. They would suffice.

He stripped and folded his clothes in the corner, then went through the laundry bin to find a used shirt. It was one of the white undershirt tees that Will wore against his skin, smelling of sweat and salt, and musk.

Satisfied, he climbed into the tub and knelt with the tweezers to remove a nest of hair from the drain. He balled it up in his hand and turned the tap on. He ran the ball of hair under the water as it heated, all of the conditioner and soap scum going down the drain to leave him with curls; beautiful curls.

Hair was, in late human history, the only thing left behind. It was the part of us that mother nature didn't seem to want to consume. Collecting the hair of loved ones had become a pastime of his. There was comfort in the ritual. In his armoire at home he had a curl of his mother's hair in a pendant, and his grandfather's baby hair in a keepsake watch cover. Next to them was a doll no bigger than his hand with perfectly straight blond hair. His grandmother

had used the golden locks from his father's first haircut, sewing them into the scalp of the little doll with care. His aunt's hair, jet black and long, a present from her in his college days, braided into the shape of a tree; black on white with a silver mat, hung in the second floor hallway.

He hummed and stuck the ball of hair into his mouth, pressed between his molars, let his eyes fall closed, and stopped up the tub drain. The quiet, and the water creeping up his legs soothed him, pulling him deeper into this planned rumination.

He pressed the t-shirt into his face and imagined himself resting with his mouth against Will's chest, breathing in against him, tongue running against the collar of the shirt to taste salt. He rubbed his nose into the under arm of the shirt and sucked at it, ready, desperate to consume some bit of Will. (He worried, in some far off place that he might one day lose control. That kisses turn to suck-bruises, that teeth *know* their purpose. Was that what Will saw that night outside the hotel?)

"I want to taste you," he whined, right hand falling to his thigh, shuddering at the thought.

He let his cock get hard enough that it started to ache a bit, bobbing and swelling in the water as he imagined what Will might allow him to have. He sucked on the edge of his bottom lip, imagining the man's earlobe in his mouth, pulsing with blood, delicate and hot.

Breaking from the fantasy for a moment, he reached out with his foot and turned off the faucet. The water splashed up the walls of the tub. Just deep enough to lick his hips, head of his cock submerged. He tossed the shirt aside and poured some of Will's conditioner into his palm, resting back to finally take his cock in hand.

He grunted a bit and started to stroke, imagining himself buried between Will's thighs, thrusting into the heat. His hips were moving on their own, desperate to get somewhere desperate to push deep.

What he really wanted was Will's cock down his throat, his front teeth and nose rubbing against Will's pubic bone, chin wet with his own saliva. He wanted to be back in that damned hotel building, on his knees and taking punishment. He wanted a new black eye.

He picked the shirt back up with a wet hand and started to shove it into his mouth, biting down on a balled up piece of it and the hair, ducking his chin to cut off a bit more of his airway.

He imagined being suffocated, being drowned by Will and gripped himself roughly enough to pull a whine from his throat. The sound didn't make it past the cloth and he felt his balls pull up tight, felt himself trip into ejaculation as spit started to choke him, grunting and coughing and working himself raw, his jaw burning with overextension. He came hard, black spreading out in his vision.

He pulled the shirt out of his mouth, spitting over the edge of the tub onto the tile, saliva falling in two long strings, Will's hair tangled in it. His breath was ragged, the veins in his neck standing up, he was vibrating.

His phone. His *phone* was vibrating. He reached a trembling arm out and turned the timer off.

"Alright," he mumbled, throat sore. "Time to bake a cake."

Chapter End Notes

So I looked up the number one swear word in Lithuanian and it turns out they mostly use their English or Russian swear words. WENT WITH RUSSIAN!

I picked lokh, meaning:
from Fenya, the slang of the gulags, and applied to the dumb idiots who fell prey to the more cunning and ruthless.

Update from a wonderful reader: It literally means loser, but in like 2000 slang. Hell, I like that even better.

CAUSE LET'S HEAR WHAT THAT THROAT DO BABY!!!

Home

Chapter Summary

Hannibal pulls a few rugs out from underneath Will, but he ends up on his feet anyhow. They finally talk about feelings, and come to an amicable agreement.

Chapter Notes

So excited to see these two finally talk about feeeeeeeeeelings

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was an empty vessel. All vigor and animating force had burned out of him in the basement of Quantico. He felt slightly nauseous, a near familiar feeling, and his nerves felt raw. He was at a tipping point.

Just that morning, after leaving the cemetery, he'd felt a brief window of balance. He'd both dealt with Hannibal and said his goodbyes to Matthew. Jack Crawford had made damn sure he couldn't grieve in private. It was difficult to find his feet on the ground after that.

Paying attention to his driving took up almost all of his energy. The coffee he'd downed as he left campus had his hands shaking on the wheel and it felt like the day after a big bender. He knew distantly that he should call Hannibal and tell him he was headed home, but he couldn't take his hands from the wheel for fear of swerving off the edge of the road.

The radio was on a local talk station and they were listing off all the native animals that were making themselves known in the face of Spring. The first half had been about wildflowers, like the ones dotting the sides of the highway in beautiful bursts of color. As they transitioned topics, he let himself fade into the background of their conversation.

"We've had sightings on the river of the Allegheny woodrat, the American water shrew, Atlantic Coast *slimy* salamanders, and a family of Appalachian cottontail rabbits, all in our first listener's survey, Meghan," a new speaker, male, said cheerfully through the radio, adding, "And that's just the A's!"

There was a bit of laughter as the host and crowd were drawn into the enthusiasm. It reminded him of the kind of videos they played in kindergarten. He felt fuzzy around the edges.

“That’s all well and good, Jim, but what about bigger animals?” the host asked, after the laughter between them and the studio audience died down.

The hair on the back of Will's neck stood up. She meant predators. They spoke off the North American Cougar, a lone predator, seen predominantly at dawn and dusk.

Hannibal came to mind. The man was so clearly a predator. His mind provided a memory of flashing teeth. The teeth had always given Hannibal's hunger away. Could he survive curling up on Hannibal's tongue, in the dark heat of his mouth much longer?

“Every Virginian knows what B stands for,” the Ranger replied, pulling Will back into the moment. “B stands for Black Bear. I don’t have to say it twice. After such a rainy winter, we find ourselves in the midst of a superbloom. With such abundant vegetation, and the insects that will no doubt pollinate it, Black Bear are bringing their young ones out.

"Out to the places we bring *our* young ones. Be careful on the trail, don't push past twilight. And remember, we’ve only had one recorded Black Bear death in these United States, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t ignore the threat of-“

Will turned off the radio as he made it off the main road, just in case. *Just in case?* It had been long enough since he’d had an episode of delirium, but he was still wary that something might happen to the radio to stop him from making it home, to run him off the road.

“I’m not psychic and there's nothing to sense,” he said to himself. “I’m worn down. I’m looking for answers to questions I shouldn’t be askin’.”

As he made the final turn and the wildflowers and trees gave way to his driveway, he found Hannibal's car in the yard in the distance. The man himself was sitting on the front porch, wine glass in hand and resting dogs at his feet. Will's pack surrounded him in an easy circle, Hannibal’s whippet tucked under his chair, and all worries of predation seemed to fall from Will like sheets of armor, leaving him swallowing around sharp emotion.

Seeing Dog with the rest of the pack, something clicked and he remembered the scrawny stray hanging around his neighbor's barn during the few weeks before he was arrested. It had put on some weight. He couldn't ignore the euphoric relief he felt flush through him as he pulled his car to a halt and turned the engine off.

Half the dogs met him as he exited the car, and the others stayed resting on the porch, soaking up the pools of sunlight. The way the light fell through Hannibal's hair, across his cheeks, had Will floating on air. The beauty of the moment was breathtaking, and for the first time in hours Will felt like he was *really* present. He smiled at Hannibal, tongue coming out to wet his lips.

"Can't tell you how happy I am to see you here," Will admitted. "I've had the day from hell."

Hannibal closed the space between them, descending the stairs with the last of the dogs, leaving the wine behind and moving with purpose. Without a word, he cradled Will's face in his hands, fingertips sliding into his hair. It was enough to take his breath away.

Hannibal's lips pressed hotly to his. It was a kiss that felt like drowning, if you were in a way to love such a dangerous thing as the sea. *God,* his mind cried out, *I'm an empty vessel caught in this tide.*

It seemed all his breath came back at once the moment Hannibal stepped back. He took in gulping lungfuls of cool air, the scents of the forest in bloom, the weight of his body all his to bear again. Dizzy, he searched Hannibal's face, unable for the moment to speak.

“Will. I forgive you for visiting Mr. Brown today," Hannibal said in a way that made it clear that he'd been planning to say it for hours, "but did you *have* to leave him my oyster knife?”

Will felt himself dissociate, reality snapping so quickly out of focus. Everything seemed to freeze for a few tense moments as he tried to understand what was being asked, and then how Hannibal could possibly know.

A childlike fear rose up sharply in him and Will had to remind himself that no one was God, and God wasn't even real.

"Did Jack call you?" he finally managed to ask.

"I'm afraid your bad day has made the press," Hannibal replied.

He held up his phone, the front page of TattleCrime filling the screen. Will snatched it from his hand, scrolling up to read the story from the beginning.

'after what appeared to be another eager courting by Hannibal Lecter-'

'remaining mystery around how the young male nurse was talked into attend murder of one of Baltimore's most-'

'knife found at the grave of the killer nurse, suggesting possible blood magic-'

'an oyster knife, signifying fertility-'

'was seen leaving his home in a fashionable turtleneck. Could this be down to his European ways, or is Doctor Lecter hiding something more sinister-'

Will shook the phone out of frustration.

"This line is completely fabricated. ' *The grave keeper demanded to know how Mr. Graham would do this in front of God, on hallowed ground.'* There wasn't even a grave keeper! For fuck's sake," Will hissed, passing the phone back like it was hot to the touch. "I think I'm gonna be sick."

"Miss Lounds is acting with little regard to her own safety," Hannibal replied, walking towards the front door to usher Will in. "One word, and she won't bother you again. You must admit though, you're showing quite a bit of devotion to a dead man."

"You're jealous," Will thought aloud.

Hannibal paused with his hand on the screen door handle, head tipping to the side in consideration.

Yeah, Will thought, *I'm gonna be sick.*

He looked over his shoulder and Will searched his face for any emotion.

"I will *always* only want you for myself," Hannibal said, betraying nothing but dead determination. "I could not help that then, nor can I now."

"You make codependency sound like a force of nature," Will replied, still in a gut-wrenching whiplash.

"I choose not to pathologize those urges," Hannibal countered. "Now, you must be starving. You look pale. Come eat."

"Yeah, you're right," Will allowed, finishing up his greetings with the dogs and following Hannibal in. "C'mon, c'mon."

He paused as soon as he was in the doorway to the kitchen, and felt almost as if he was being baptized in the scents of his childhood. The dogs ran around his legs, leaving him to breathe deeply, mouth half open.

Like the rest of him, Will's sense of nostalgia and deja-vu ran hot. As clear as music, he could read scent. He could pull out and see the layers. The only problem was that sometimes it hit him so hard he felt like he was drunk off it.

He had the sense that this moment was one of transformation. He was stepping right into a bear's jaws, to the sound of a long forgotten song.

"Court-bouillon, with sweat-meats," Hannibal announced, returning from the kitchen with a nondescript beer bottle, cold from the fridge. "Side of dirty rice, drop biscuits, and a citrus lager."

Will felt some of the fear leave his body as he accepted the beer and walked past Hannibal to the dining room. He looked over the table, hands resting on the back of a chair.

"Will," Hannibal said, resting a hand on his shoulder. "Sit and eat. Jack has really put you through the ringer, hasn't he?"

It was all Will needed to give in. The straw that broke the camel's back and all that, he thought.

"I thought for so long that I could achieve some satisfying end. That I could stand between good and evil, bring light to things I could see that others couldn't, and finally see myself in the ranks of respected moral high ground," Will explained. "The system doesn't care about morality. Humans aren't moral or immoral. Humans are social, and I've always been alone."

Telling the truth was enough to snap Will out of his haze and get his body to follow simple instructions again. He sat at the table, eyes flitting away from the meal to nervously take in

Hannibal's response.

With a deep breath, Hannibal sat across from him and nodded once before picking up his spoon.

"You aren't alone," Hannibal assured him, "I'm right here with you. Now, stop running in circles in your mind and fill your belly. One cannot subsist on revelations alone."

Will laughed out a tight sound and acquiesced. He dipped a biscuit into the court-bullion, finally allowing himself to try it. He took a bite and closed his eyes, letting himself be in the present for the time being. Hannibal had made him a hometown favorite to comfort him, just like people who had loved him had done along the way. Those people who knew him as a child, and those who saw him as a project. And then, in some incomprehensible new category, those who *saw* him.

The dinner made him think of eloping and he choked a bit on another laugh. He cleared his throat and held up the empty beer bottle.

"This is just amazing. Really just, just very good. Still, I'll need a few more of these."

Hannibal smiled warmly, his real smile, and Will couldn't help but return it. He nodded to the fridge, and Will got up from his seat. As he stood, his chair making a soft noise on the floor, some of the dogs looked up at him from where they lay in the doorway to the living room. His heart was full to bursting, or maybe he could just feel his own heartbeat.

"Top shelf. There is also apple brandy for you on the counter," Hannibal said. "Have whatever you like."

Will opened the fridge door, the clatter of the bottles in the door announcing themselves.

"I remember Dog now," he said, looking into the fridge, "I was in the process of buying him off the old man. Do you want to know his old name?"

"His past was filled with strife," Hannibal replied, "and hunger. If any word would unlock those memories, it would be that name. Let's leave it to the past."

Will was a bit surprised by that answer. It was either good insight or peak projection. The latter he could forgive, and it *was* a good point.

"Okay, deal," he agreed.

He pulled two beer bottles out, noting the extra food filling all the previously empty places between his groceries. There was a syrupy feeling of domesticity, of sharing space and anticipating needs.

"What's the alcohol content in these?" he asked as he closed the fridge and walked back around the table to his seat.

"Around 13%," Hannibal replied. "I brewed it myself, with you in mind. I hope you enjoy it."

"That's why I feel so warm."

Once he was seated again they both drank deeply, Hannibal finishing the glass of wine he'd been metering out. With the dogs napping in the living room and Hannibal sitting across from him trying to *ensure his enjoyment,* the rest of the world seemed so far away.

The soup was close to how he remembered it from his childhood, but he couldn't place the meat, which only meant he couldn't put it off any longer.

"Is someone I know in the soup, Hannibal?"

Eyes up.across from him, scanning his hands, his face.

"The soup?" Hannibal parroted, "No. Not in the soup."

Will met his eyes and then looked at the table, biscuits and rice and finally, the sweating bottle of beer in his own hand.

"Who's in the beer?" he asked.

"Brewing beer with wild yeast and bacteria adds another step to an already intensive process," Hannibal replied. "There is a reason for the fright around the word brew. Just like fermentation, it is more art than cooking. I hear that our esteemed colleague Dr. Chilton is extending his sabbatical in Frankfurt. Perhaps he has become interested in the more cultural aspects of German lager brewing."

Will scrunched his nose up and looked closer at the bottle. "Thank you for your…honesty. Tell me less about that and more about the soup."

It was all he needed to say. Hannibal set down his fork and began pronouncing his culinary feats.

"It's a fish base, of course," he began.

"Of course," Will said in agreement, smiling to himself.

"Fish stock. Bell pepper, onion, garlic and celery. Fresh herbs: thyme, parsley, bay leaf."

"Gorgeous," Will said, taking a swig of the apparently *human* beer and leaning back to appreciate Hannibal in his element. Somehow, he wasn't surprised he could stomach it.

"The heat comes from cayenne pepper, creole seasoning and hot sauce. A little lemon juice and worcestershire," Hannibal added, "and poached sweat-meats. Ris d'agneau."

"Lamb? Should I be preparing for a new case?" Will asked.

Hannibal straightened up, a look of concentration tightening his brow. "You told me you didn't want another Leda."

"I did," Will agreed. It was stupid to feel disappointment. "It's not safe, they're not done with you. Jack isn't done with you."

"Or you," Hannibal challenged. "Dessert? I made a strawberry cake with mint julep frosting."

Will didn't even have to reply, Hannibal was already heading to the kitchen, plating the most beautiful slices of cake Will had ever seen.

"Shall we finish on the back porch?" Hannibal asked.

"I'll get the door, the dogs need to go out too," Will agreed.

He whistled for the pack and opened the back door and screen, holding it open for all the dogs to mill out and head for the trees. Dog was the last to leave, head tilting comically as he crossed the threshold, eyes glued on Hannibal.

"Go ahead," Hannibal told him, real warmth in his voice, and Dog took off like a deer, bounding through the air to join the others.

Will closed the door after Hannibal was seated, then sat in the Adirondack chair next to him. He opened what would be his third beer, and looked at it through the glass bottle for a long moment. Hannibal broke the bubble by holding a dessert plate in his periphery.

"You're risking an awful lot by staying in Baltimore," Will said, eyes tracking the pack in the distance as he told his first bite of the cake. It was bright and moist and decadent at the same time. He took a swig of beer and tried to imagine Chilton in his last moments. "I can take or leave the teaching job. It was the same with being a street cop. I've put in my time, I can start over."

Hannibal didn't say anything as he let the comparison drag out a bit.

"I'm saying, I might understand why you'd be hesitant to leave your life here," Will explained, "what with your, your practice. Your house and all that damned finery."

Hannibal laughed, interrupting him to say, "damned finery. You think my hesitation lies in paintings and prestige?"

Will shrugged and started eating his slice of cake. "That's not what I meant. *This is good by the way.* I meant, why haven't you left?"

"You must know the answer to that question," Hannibal said, sounding honestly baffled.

"Speculation is my career," Will explained, being honest in a way he hadn't felt coming on. "In my personal life I need something more categorical."

Hannibal sat up a bit, looking out over the property. Will couldn't tell what he was thinking, but he knew he would remember his answer for the rest of his life. He held his breath.

"Baltimore, Maryland. The East coast of the United States. The continental US as a whole," Hannibal said, setting down his plate and fork and dusting his hands off. "Not a single thing

holds my focus or intent but your conversation. Not a thing holds me here but you."

Will felt his face reacting to questions bouncing around his own head and finally looked over to catch Hannibal's eye.

He should save the meat from the soup for sampling. He should save the beer. He should save himself.

"We'll need to leave soon," he whispered. "We can't leave the dogs."

Hannibal was about to answer him when his new work pager went off on his hip. He jumped like he was electrified, startled into taking it off his belt and reading the message.

SUSPECT IDENTIFIED - - MEET AT DISPATCH 2700 WEST -

"It's the Organ Harvester!"

The excitement at the prospect of catching a suspect dulled a bit as he realized that this was the worst possible time to go anywhere. He was practically drunk, and Hannibal was-

"I'll drive," Hannibal said, perking up and smiling at him with mischief in his eyes. "I've only had a glass of red. You're tipsy. Let's get the dogs inside."

Will's head was spinning, but he couldn't help feeling like a mischievous child himself. *Yeah, okay,* he thought. Why not go with a serial killer to a crime scene? *Why not run away together?*

"Yeah, okay," Will said, "but let me finish my cake."

Hannibal looked at him like he was holding up the entire world and they broke into gentle laughter. He felt giddy.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal, dressed in a French maid outfit: you made kitten very sad by visiting that silly dead boy.

Will: are you seriously jealous of a dead man?

Hannibal: I'm jealous of the wind, for the way it can caress you.

Will: yeah, okay that works for me

Save Him

Chapter Summary

> Will and Hannibal get on the road while Jack and the team do the same. We get a rare glimpse into Jack's view of Will.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal had served Will the best slice of cake he'd ever eaten, fork still pressed between his lips, after the best dinner of his life. Earlier in the night he had even pronounced his love, as clearly as he ever had.

Not a thing holds me here but you.

They were about to talk about leaving together. They were making plans, as it were. So why risk everything just for a case, and not even a good one? Was it habit, or deflection? Maybe something he was less comfortable with; power plays.

He never would have thought of going to work drunk in the past, but he couldn't pass up the opportunity to show off how easily he could wield Hannibal in situations of status. He'd have the opportunity to look Brian in the eye without fear of criticism, as either he or Hannibal would take down the idiot Organ Harvester, surely.

On some level he felt like a bullied child again; too small, too pretty, too strange. He felt his eyes welling up and blinked away drunken tears.

He set his fork down on his plate and cleared his throat, it was important that he kept moving. Too much rumination would drown him. He finished his beer and stood from his seat, whistling to the dogs. "Last call, go potty!"

Hannibal mumbled something and Dog appeared from under his seat to run to the others. Will wasn't sure when the little thing had joined them on the porch. Everything was a bit of a blur as he took the first few steps towards the pack. Hannibal was saying something to him, his voice coming over Will's shoulder growing softer as he walked out of the open field and into the trees.

There was a thick metallic taste in the back of his throat, his mind bringing up some disturbing fact or another about brain bleeds, but he pushed deeper into the dark, following the sounds of his dogs and the smell of driftwood rotting. He didn't remember the trees growing so closely together, couldn't think of a time when the branches had scraped against his face before he found water, didn't recall when the sun had gone down, didn't remember where he was-

Hannibal made it to Will just as his knees gave out, hushing his pained groans and keeping him from face planting in some skunk weed. He held Will by the shoulders as he knelt and vomited into the bush. Dinner, drinks, dessert, all of it gone by the end. A whole day worth of cooking, laid out on the ground. He just rubbed Will's back soothingly through it all, feeling muscles jump and shudder as the poor man retched.

It took a good five minutes to get Will to his feet, and another two to get them out of the brambles he'd wandered into. By the end of it they were both covered in bright red pricks of blood along their forearms and hands.

They dusted themselves off at the porch and Hannibal reached out to run his thumb across Will's cheek. As expected, Will's eyes fluttered closed for a few moments. When he opened them after a deep breath, Hannibal was showing him the blood across the pad of his thumb before sucking it into his mouth. Will watched carefully, even mimicking the swallow.

When Will's concentration finally broke away he was gruff, commanding. "Come on in, come on," he hollered to the dogs. "You too, now."

Hannibal followed, the dogs running into the house like a herd of wild ponies ahead of them. Will's movements were stunted as he approached the kitchen sink, leaning his whole body weight against the counter with a sigh when he made it. Hannibal closed and locked the back door, then hovered next to him, eyes on his back as he spat into the sink.

"Was there a reason for drugging me tonight?" Will asked, voice raspy as he rinsed his mouth out with water, hand going out for the toothbrush and half empty tube of toothpaste he kept on the sink. "Because last time I got a blow job is all I'm sayin'."

Every soft edge, every lost consonant drew out a feeling of warmth and affection in Hannibal, his shoulders pushing back, chest expanding. He took a steadying breath, gathered himself.

"You needed a night off," he replied at length. "Long ago you asked me for what I believe you called the *good stuff*. If any night called for it, tonight was the night."

"I meant *offer* me the good stuff, not dose me," Will grumbled, turning off the faucet and brushing his teeth.

"I'll make sure to remember that," Hannibal replied, unable to stop the smile he felt coming on.

Will spat the toothpaste out and turned the trap back on to rinse, shaking his hands dry. "Yeah, I'd believe that, but you always gotta be in the-the driver's seat."

Hannibal closed the space between them and pressed himself along Will's back, nosing along his hairline, breathing him in. It took a little longer than normal for Will to react, but when he did it was to turn in Hannibal's arms and look up at him.

"Darling," he murmured, watching Will's lips twitch, "would drive-through coffee cheer you up?"

Will rolled his eyes and laughed a little before allowing a slow kiss to interrupt the conversation. It was good to be there, in his kitchen, holding him, tasting him, even if he'd just been sick.

When they broke apart, breathing raggedly, mouths open, Will twined their fingers together and sighed before whispering, "yes, a drive-through coffee would cheer me up."

"Perfect," Hannibal cried, glad to be back on the same page. "Let's hope no one dies of blood loss while we're on a detour."

Will laughed, his reddened cheeks cherubic, and Hannibal lifted their joined hands to his lips to leave one more kiss before breaking apart.

Dog was the only one that protested as they closed up the house, but they both agreed he should stay behind. Soon enough they made their way to the front door and out into the crisp air. The evening hour was bringing home the birds in the trees above and Hannibal's heart swelled with the beauty of nature around them.

"What *did* you give me?" Will asked, fumbling with the passenger door handle and cursing to himself.

"It's locked," Hannibal told him, unlocking the car on his side and slipping into the driver's seat. Will got the door open and closed then, but was having trouble with the seatbelt. It was incredibly endearing.

"Only a personal blend of sedatives in your first beer," he replied. "Not enough to affect you *this* much. I'm afraid you're feeling mostly alcohol."

"Sure," Will said, seatbelt conquered and arms crossed. His head tipped back to rest and his eyes closed.

"Did you think of saying no to Jack?" Hannibal asked.

"Mm-mm" Will disagreed. "This is my case. I wanna see him get taken in."

"Rest your eyes," Hannibal said, "I'll wake you at the scene."

"Don't forget the coffee," Will said, letting out another long, sleepy sigh. "An' don't let me stop breathing."

"You're in good hands," Hannibal replied.

"Mm," Will murmured, drifting off with his head against the window, breath fogging up the glass.

Hannibal waited a few minutes, the length of the back road between Will's property and the cross street he would take to the freeway, to take Will's work pager from his belt for the address.

The drive was almost nauseatingly romantic, the few wispy clouds in the distance painted orange by the setting sun as the whole sky took on a blushing pink hue. Wildflowers, more than he could count, and in a greater diversity than he's seen in years, created washes of color in the fields to his right and left. Pink, blue, purple, yellow and orange. And amongst it all a vibrant green. A new year, a new life, a night out on the town with the man he loved.

Another look at Will, and he retrieved the pager from his belt without waking him. They were fifteen minutes out from the meeting place, an ambulance routing center. They were closer than Jack, it seemed, so they had a few minutes to spare. He thought back on what Will had said about the case during dessert.

'This killer is pathetic,' he had sighed. 'He's a wannabe surgeon without enough experience under his belt to succeed in organ harvesting, let alone take up the moniker they've given him.'

That, and Brian Zeller thought Hannibal *himself* was the killer. That seemed to be what made Will so angry. Having Will angry on his behalf was gratifying behind the scenes, but seeing that fire burn in person? Along with the vindication of a theory, Hannibal wouldn't mind rubbing it in a bit. They were both a bit possessive that way.

In reality, this was the perfect time to play the hero. Whatever the case, he would get a picture of himself on the scene, and if luck had its way, he could comfort some victim. He'd let Will get his fix, whatever he was getting out of this, and also blur the view of himself in the press. Brilliant timing really.

Jack took his eyes off the road for a second to watch his passengers in the mirror as he snapped his fingers abruptly in the air.

"Quiet," he commanded, feeling less like a boss and more like a parental figure. He'd talked to his therapist about it, but that was another thing. "I didn't insist on the carpool to listen to you yammer on."

"Why *did* you invite us, then?" Jimmy asked, incapable as always if keeping a question to himself.

"I *invited* you along so we could talk about Will."

Brian and Jimmy both groaned, averting their eyes out the car windows. They were like brothers. There was no getting past it.

"Will is under a lot of stress right now," Jack continued. "He's not going to be of any use to us if you peck at him like chickens the second he arrives. I need you two to give him some space."

"What exactly does space-" Brian interrupted.

"Neither of you twerps, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart, neither of you would have made it through prison," Jack replied. "So **that's** what I mean when I say space. Give

the man some damned space!"

He put so much power behind each word in the last sentence that both of his passengers wilted in their seats. They always had to push back, he knew, but damned if it didn't drag on him from time to time.

Being the team lead at Quantico meant corralling and managing only those who were the best in their fields. Type A, tenaciously brilliant, painfully persistent people. What made them good at their jobs usually made them difficult on teams. And then there was Will. Will, who never fit in anywhere.

"We understand, Jack," Jimmy said, elbowing Brian in the side if the sounds of his painful gasp said anything.

"Yeah, Boss," Brian said, reluctantly.

Jack nodded, turning the radio back on. Kendrick Lamar and The Weeknd were on repeat with Pray For Me, off the Black Panther soundtrack.

'I'm always ready for a war again (a war again)

Go down that road again (that road again)

It's all the same (it's all the same)

I'm always ready to take a life again

You know I'll ride again

It's all the same'

"We'll be there in ten minutes," he said, starting to feel in control again. "Hopefully when we make it to dispatch we can get a location on the ambulance."

"I told you that it wasn't Hannibal," Jimmy gloated in the back seat, grinning at Brian. "He's not spending his nights driving a local ambulance."

"Yeah, well, we know where he's spending his nights, don't we?" Brain shot back.

"Don't be crass-"

Jack turned the radio volume up and The Weeknd sang through the car.

'Tell me who's gon' save me from myself

When this life is all I know

Tell me who's gon' save me from this hell

Without you, I'm all alone

Who gon' pray for me?'

Jack focused back on the road, but the lyrics struck a chord in his mind, the memory of Will standing in front of the grave of a man grieved by only him. Those two men just as easily could have switched spots, Will the one six feet under. He was starting to understand that he wasn't ever going to be enough to save Will Graham from himself. It left a sick feeling in his stomach.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal, watching Will stumble off to vomit in a bush: SO THIS IS LOVE, LA LA LA LA, SO THIS IS LOVE! ✌🥴🫶😫😍🥰🥵🕊️🌞🙌😂❤️

Jack, across town, getting ready for a terrible night: get in losers. I can't believe this is my life.😐😐😐💀💀💀

Fur

Chapter Summary

The case has Will back in his element, no matter what's in his bloodstream, and Hannibal is keeping Jack at bay. Memories, premonitions and dreams blur together as Hannibal steps into the role of savior and Will joins him in a prayer of sorts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was twenty or thirty minutes after sunset, in that time where the sun was hidden from view below the horizon and the lingering light turned blue. It pulled memories from the depth of Will's consciousness as he woke in the passenger seat of Hannibal's car. He was so rarely the passenger in cars as an adult, so rarely on the road after sundown, that his mind tried to convince him it was morning, and he was going to fish with his daddy. Nausea followed as he blinked himself fully awake.

"We're just there," Hannibal said, the change in pavement announcing their arrival moments before. "Your coffee is in the console."

Will took the paper cup out and sipped at it to keep busy while he tried to get his bearings back. Hannibal pulled them into a space near the back of the ambulance depot, and they could see Jack talking to a tall man with a bright red beard who seemed to be in charge. In the shadows next to them were Jimmy Price and Brian.

God, he missed Beverly. It ached like a healing wound. She was safe, he reminded himself. He hadn't heard from her, but that was the plan. No news is good news, like a cancer scan. He wondered if he would ever break his silence, or if he would actually manage to do the one thing fate had tried to keep him from; leaving it all behind.

As Will got out of the car and walked around it, coffee cup in hand, he was warmed by Hannibal's presence at his side.

"How do I look?" he asked, not sure he would pass as sober enough to actually be there. He felt detached in an unexpected way.

"Conflicted, exhausted. Like any other full time professor would be at this hour," Hannibal replied, not as soothing as intended. He seemed to pick up on that fact and reiterated. "You look perfectly acceptable, under the circumstances."

"I would have appreciated a bit more of a sugar coating, but thank you for your honesty," Will said, smiling again so easily at Hannibal's frankness.

"Did I omit your haunting beauty and beguiling nature for time? That is perhaps true," Hannibal said, just as they got noticed by Jack. "We are running late."

"Beguiling nature," Will echoed under his breath, unconsciously matching Hannibal's tone and accent.

Jimmy and Brian were off talking to the manager with the red beard, perhaps finding the ambulance that had set off their system. The one that had been present in the vicinity of the last three Organ Harvester crime scenes. The driver, an EMT, was off duty, so they could take some prints and swabs and get an address for the driver. Jack explained all that quickly; emotionless.

In the meantime, *Will was in trouble.*

"I need you to want this," Jack drilled into him. "Showing up like this makes me think you don't want to catch this guy. Do you want to catch this guy?"

"Would you rather I leave?" Will shot back, ears ringing a bit. "I can't carry a gun again yet, so I'm not gonna be the guy that gets him, anyhow. Unless you think he's gonna get away. Did you call me for a *chase* that you think it's gonna be a crime scene?"

"Do you want me to find a replacement, Will? Are you that far gone?"

Hannibal stepped between them and led Jack away, just as Will felt himself about to snap. The two men argued over his value and urgency and some other shit, but Will was ignoring them at that point. It was wonderfully refreshing to have Hannibal lead the distraction away, the same way it felt closing a door in someone's face. It was an instant relief.

His focus was able to drift back to the dozen or so ambulances beating worked on in the huge open space of the bay. It was as big as an airplane hanger, and it smelled of gasoline and industrial cleaner. It reminded Will of the train depot on the edge of town where he spent some of his childhood years. Back then he could walk right up next to the trains, feel the hot metal, steam hissing like the gasps of breath, and the cacophony was so overwhelming it felt ritualistic.

Entering the station was giving up his comfort in order to stand next to a mechanical beast and feel its power. Now, being around that many loud ambulances, all that exhaust and adrenaline in the air, was overwhelming in the same way. A tide coming in, closer and deeper, closer and deeper, until you lose your footing.

When things finally blurred in his vision he was able to see their killer. He was in here each week like clockwork, keeping up with his duties with just enough time to do a little something on the side.

The Opportunist,

the Psychopath,

the Aspiring Surgeon.

Not quite our caliber though, Will thought ruefully, a shadow shaped like Hannibal at his side. He wouldn't run, wouldn't give chase, because losing everything for this little prick would be stupid.

"It's gone!" Brian shouted, jogging back to them just ahead of Jimmy.

"What do you mean it's gone?" Jack shouted over the din.

"It's not there," Jimmy replied, catching up to them and nodding at Will. "He wasn't supposed to have it out today. We're lucky, though, because they all have onboard tracking!"

The manager made it to the group and passed over a mobile GPS unit. They seemed to be getting smaller every year. Everyone encircled the unit, eyes directed to the map on the screen and the blinking green light. Will checked the ticker tape at the bottom for the street name and realized he wasn't more than five minutes away.

The room around him went dark, only he noticed, and a single spotlight shone down, lighting the circle of men. Will stepped back, into the darkness, and looked around.

A light turned on inside the ambulance closest to him and Will approached it with caution. Like an old home movie, reel-to-reel, a vision of the killer flickered to life in the driver's seat. An ordinary man in a familiar uniform.

"Hiding in plain sight," Will murmured. "You know you might get caught, but the money is too good. Or maybe the debt is too bad."

Another few seconds and he came back to himself with a huge gasp.

"How long has it been missing?" He asked, eyes blinking to clear the fog in his brain.

"Could be minutes, could be hours. Either way he didn't get far. I'm sending someone with you, just in case it's needed, but we'll trail a block behind until you say so," the ambulance manager said. "Lights and sirens on?"

Jack looked up from the blinking dot and seemed to do the math in his head. "Off."

"We'll follow you," Hannibal said, walking to Will as everyone else walked towards Jack's car. "Are you ready?"

Will nodded and followed him. The first step out of the bay was breathtaking. The night sky was expansive, stars dotting the royal blue and wisps of clouds dissipating and catching the first rays of moonlight. The moon, pregnant and low in the sky, seemed to be looking right at them, another spotlight, another blinking dot.

Hannibal pulled Will along and helped him get in the passenger seat. When Hannibal opened the driver's side door and slipped into his seat, Will took his hand and gripped it desperately. Hannibal closed the door and turned to look at him, leaning in to listen.

"Best behavior," Will demanded. "So many eyes are on us. Promise me you'll be on your best behavior."

Hannibal licked his lips and nodded. "I agree completely. Best behavior."

Will took a deep breath and nodded, sitting back and looking out the car window as they pulled out of the space and onto the street. The moon was on his side of the car as they drove, following Jack as closely as possible. Will saw his face lit up by it in the small mirror on the visor. The hue was one of death, black and blue in the crescents below his eyes.

"This is nothing," Hannibal said, his voice soothing. "This small man is running a second rate butcher shop for his own profit. His capture is a formality, like a work luncheon. Let the men with guns do their job. Just take in everything you can, so that tomorrow you can finish tying this case up with a bow."

"And then we can start planning to leave," Will concluded.

Hannibal nodded.

"Okay," Will said, cracking his knuckles. "What did Jack say?"

"He's worried that he's losing you," Hannibal replied, slowing the car as Jack slammed on his brakes and drove onto the right-hand median and down a small road.

"He said that?" Will asked, shocked.

"No. He said a lot about performance and compatibility, but his eyes told me the rest."

Will didn't have time to respond as they followed Jack's car off into the dark and towards what appeared to be the ambulance they were looking for. It was parked on the freeway median. The back doors were hanging open, lights showing how empty it was as they pulled to a park behind it.

They both jumped from the parked car, running towards the shouting and wild sways of flashlights. For a few moments Will could only hear his own breathing in the dark night, but when he made it to Jack he stopped wondering where Hannibal was, because they had found the killer.

"Hands up," Jack shouted, among a lot of other words.

For a moment Will thought that the killer was tearing the victim open, but as he got closer it was clear that he was doing hands-on compressions of the victim's heart.

"We need a doctor!" Will shouted. "Radio the ambulance to come!"

Hannibal emerged from the crowd, pulling on a pair medical gloves as he jogged towards the bloody mess with his doctor's bag under his arm.

"Light," Hannibal said as he knelt next to the killer and victim and prepared to take over lifesaving measures. "And cuff him!"

Will grabbed the closest flashlight, snagged out of someone's hand, and focused the beam on the victim's chest cavity. Everything stuttered into slow motion, the flashing red and white

lights of the approaching second ambulance flashed slowly and it sounded like a military helicopter touching down.

Woosh.

Woosh.

Woosh.

Each huff of hot breath from above, nearly pressing him to the ground. Gravity seemed to play with him, holding him for a moment too long with every step. All the while the open maw of the victim's chest grew and pulsed in his view.

(Come closer. Fight the instinct to run. *It wants you.*)

Woosh.

Woosh.

Woosh.

As he trudged across the knee-high grasses to Hannibal's side, someone's flashlight landed briefly on Hannibal's face and for that moment the memory had him; Hannibal, kneeling in the field behind the hotel, eyes glowing red in his flashlight beam. It felt thick in his throat, like it had been a premonition.

Woosh.

Woosh.

Woosh.

He needed to keep his eyes glued to Hannibal's hands, he decided, the blue of the surgical gloves hovering momentarily above the mess. It felt like something playing in reverse as the killer removed his hands and held them, bloodied, above his head. Will watched as Hannibal's hands entered the victim. It was too much, but instead of looking away as he moved closer, he caught Hannibal's eye.

In his periphery, the killer was cuffed and led away. All around him, medics and police shouted commands. With the flashlight trained on the big reveal, and Hannibal literally holding a man's life in his hands, Will felt his heartbeat through his whole body. Things sped up and he took a much needed breath. The grass under the victim looked a whole lot like gravel to him, and he felt the crunch of it under his shoes.

He stepped closer and knelt next to Hannibal. When he looked down at last there was the body of a mangled deer. It was injured, but it was breathing. There was blood on its tongue, foaming as it took in a shaky breath.

"Can you save it?" Will asked.

Hannibal nodded, and just as they could hear the rescue crew closing in, Will let his hand rest on the victim's bloodied side. He could feel *fur, and he wasn't afraid.*

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal, juggling five things at once: Stop trying to cancel my beautiful wife!🤫🤫🤫🤫

Will, eyes wide, swatting at bugs that aren't there: does anybody else feel like my dad is somehow in this room judging me?😶😳😵💫

Hannibal: your doing fine, sweetie ❤️💯❤️👍

Jack, Brian, and Jimmy, simultaneously: I'd better be getting overtime pay👼👼👼

A man, bleeding out in a field: 🖤🖤😖

Kill Will Graham

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has saved a life. Now there's paperwork and red tape. And declarations of some type in the car on the way home.
Once they get home, things heat up and confessions are made. Happily ever?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal could keep going for hours. They had satisfied Jack and the medical board paperwork, so there was little more than formality holding them there, but in that bright circle of field, like a false cupola, (light a membrane holding them in, night at the edge inky black and littered with stars) it all still felt like a folktale. *Hannibal* still felt like the victor.

In the night air under the diesel hung fragrant wintersweet, witch hazel, blooming Cornelian cherry. In the tight circle of exhausted professionals it smelled of bitter sweat and coffee, musk and blood. Countless insects battered them, drawn in by the light. Everyone repelled the flying onslaught in the same way. He let himself tune out, focusing on the shoulder hitches and hand swipes. Their movements, and the movements of the bugs seemed to hum along a rhythm. Time seemed to stand still, or rather repeat.

An hour and a half of paperwork, and the constant hum of the crime scene lighting rig had drained every last word from Will. Across from him, he stood weakly, swaying on his feet, eyes almost closing. Hannibal knew that within minutes his knees would give way. As beautiful a thought it was to catch him like a damsel, he chose to break the spell and save him some dignity.

"If you don't mind," he said, clearing his throat and standing, "I need to drive Will home." His hips protested the plastic folding chair he'd been sitting in, but he ignored the pain and watched Will snap to attention.

He walked Will along to the car without another word. He didn't touch him on the way, knowing that any sign of affection could be noted in Jack's mind as coercion. The car gave them privacy. He took Will's hands between his own and blew hot breath to heat him up as soon as they were alone. Will's fingers were freezing. He needed to be looked after.

"Put your hands on the heater," he said as he let Will go, starting up the car and pulling out onto the road.

He watched the dome of light in the field grow smaller as they gained speed, to stop himself from speaking while the moment called for silence. Soon the light was just a speck in the rear view mirror.

Will rested his hands over the vents as they drove along and Hannibal couldn't tell if he was exhausted or thinking. He felt completely wired himself, like he could go for a run. It was the same feeling as after a concert or opera, the adrenaline still doping the bloodstream. He turned the radio up as they pulled onto the freeway, trying to block out the thoughts in his head. Nothing, unfortunately, could drown them out.

Will had seen something.

Will had seen *something* when he'd met Hannibal's eyes across the fence. What that something was, Hannibal didn't know. Will had looked at him with such childlike hope. Did he see some savior? The victor he had seen himself as?

No. They could never live without some blood on their teeth.

He had to admit that it felt good, though, to hold a life in his hands again. Hot, vital, precarious. In such circumstances it was almost as much of an aphrodisiac to save a life, therefore defeating nature, as it was to let one so close to slipping away do just that by feigning ignorance. Even Jack betrayed himself by looking on with wonder.

"Will," Hannibal said, finally unable to live in his mind alone.

He didn't say anything more.

The first word was spoken between them in around a half hour, it hung in the air. It was all he needed to say. Will took a deep breath and sat up a bit in his seat, tugging at the seatbelt near his neck and stretching a bit, scratching at the skin near his collar. He finally spoke. It was a whisper, but Hannibal heard it clear as day.

"I'd like to see you kill."

Hannibal's mouth hung open for a moment, every previous thought knocked right out of him. He was no longer seeing the road in front of him, no longer driving that car, but falling. Falling to his knees as he did that night in the hotel, at utter submission, complete acquiescence. The car beeped, telling him he'd veered a little too close to the shoulder, and he snapped back to reality.

"Don't. Don't say anything," Will added, looking back out the passenger side window into the night.

Heat ran through Hannibal's body and he adjusted himself in his seat. It was a shock to the system, no matter how many times it happened, to be seen by Will, completely.

The dogs were pawing at the door when they got to the house, and they burst free as a group with joy and confusion, in varying states of alarm. Dog spun in circles at Hannibal's feet as Will allowed his pack to smell him from tip to toe. They focused most ardently on his shoes and shirt cuffs.

“We should shower off first, but I want to draw us a bath,” Will said, a direction, not a question. “Make sure they go, yeah?”

Will left them all outside and closed the screen door to prevent any stragglers. His house was pleasantly warm and smelled of dog and pine. He walked past the dog beds and into the kitchen, leaving the light off and grabbing one last beer from the fridge for them to split. He shuffled in the dark back to the bathroom, and turned on the hot water tap. All of it came easy, the next part was what might be difficult.

Hannibal opened the screen door a few minutes later, letting the dogs inside with that familiar trampling sound and the clicking of nails. Will heard him cooing to Dog and rustling through the closet for treats, surely. Would this be how it felt, in that far off place, in their future home? Exhaustion momentarily forgotten, he felt such a rush of affection that he had to sit on the edge of the bath.

He opened the beer and took a swig, then shucked his shirt and undershirt into the basket in the corner. He realized he was hard when he pulled at his belt buckle, head spinning. Another swing of beer, up on his feet to toss his pants aside, and lose his underwear and socks, and he got in under the spray of hot water. He allowed himself a single tug of his cock before hissing and putting his hands behind his back.

After a few more minutes Hannibal joined him in the bathroom, leaving the dogs in the living room.

“More beer?” Hannibal asked unbuttoning his shirt and slipping out of his shoes.

“Hair of the dog,” Will replied, handing the bottle over and watching Hannibal’s throat as he drank some down. He took the bottle back and Hannibal undressed the rest of the way, unveiling erect nipples, plush chest hair, and finally, his half-hard cock in a nest of curls. He thought about that first photo he’d seen of Hannibal at the gym, how muscular he was, how incredibly powerful he had seemed.

“Tell me what you’re thinking just now,” Hannibal asked, stepping into the tub next to him and tipping his head back to wet his hair under the shower spray.

Will set the beer aside and pressed himself up against Hannibal’s chest.

“You’re built like a brick shithouse,” he murmured, rubbing his face against Hannibal’s chest hair and letting the shower water fill his mouth.

Hannibal laughed, a sputtered, surprise of a sound, and Will smiled against his skin. *God,* Hannibal always made him feel like he’d found his audience. He let himself indulge and gripped Hannibal’s upper thighs in both hands, middle fingers pressing in between his cheeks.

“You were...something else tonight,” Will said, hands clenching skin hard enough to bruise, rolling his hips with each word. He didn’t miss the gasps it was drawing from Hannibal’s lungs. “Hands covered in blood, conducting life itself like a damn song.”

Hannibal pulled him closer and it felt like fucking, cock pressing hot into his hip, sliding against his own. The heat between them burned. Will could barely breathe, it felt so good. So good he didn't want to move.

"You asked for best behavior," Hannibal murmured, licking up behind his ear and sending tingling fingers down his spine.

Will choked on a laugh. Who knew he could draw something like best behavior out of a killer. Numerous people had warned him against falling for students or colleagues, but no one had warned him against this.

"How about a little best behavior right now?" he asked, pulling back from Hannibal and pressing three fingers to his lips before he could speak.

Instead, his jaw went slack and his lips sucked, and there was a second where the teeth almost caught. Will felt it directly in his cock. He met Hannibal's eyes with fresh curiousity. Hannibal gave him a curt nod, and Will's hand went to his shoulder. In that moment the Chesapeake Ripper knelt before him, eyes burning with desperation.

Will pulled his fingers from his mouth and pressed the head of his cock between wet lips. Hannibal licked around the crown and looked up at him as he took him into that hot mouth. Will couldn't help the praise falling from his lips.

"Perfect. You were perfect tonight. No one I'd rather be with in a fucking, fuck, fucking field in the middle of the night. Jesus, oh, that feels good."

Hannibal sputtered and coughed around him, tightening his lips and aspirating shower water. His eyes were red and wet, just like his lips, just like the head of his cock. He looked waterlogged, hair in his face, bending to take Will deeper, water droplets suspended from his eyelashes. Will snapped his hips, choking him on purpose, then pulled him off almost all the way with a fist full of hair.

He felt wild, like the look in Hannibal's eyes might actually kill him. He let him catch his breath, get his balance again. No need to rush.

He looked over Hannibal's face as he shifted his position slightly and the shower spray hit him right in the face. He held him there, blinking and sputtering until he finally stopped trying to struggle.

"That's it. Gentle, gentle," he soothed, gripping his hair tighter, giving him what he needed, that little bit of pain.

He started up a rhythm, fucking into Hannibal's throat and holding him there for a count of two, then letting him go to breathe. The more water Hannibal took in, the more he struggled. Not against Will's grip, but his own bodies' need to clear his airway. It felt like being a god, to control this beast. His own.

"Swallow it," he said, after a time that felt right on the edge of forever. "Swallow it all down now."

His hips stuttered forward on their own, erratically. His rhythm broken, and Hannibal finally looking like a wet rat, Will felt himself tip over into orgasm, and let his eyes close. Hannibal took him all the way in and sucked down everything he had to give, only breaking for air once Will had started to slump down into the tub.

Hannibal waited for Will to nod, and then pulled at his own cock roughly, grunting his name.

“Will. Will. Will.”

“Beautiful,” Will said, licking his lips and grinning. He leaned forward and gripped Hannibal’s balls, rolling them in his hand and giving them a tug. He couldn’t help giggling at how lost Hannibal was, how good it all felt.

Hannibal came onto his own belly, chest heaving as he drew in breath. They rested there, laughing together for a few more long minutes before they could breathe normally again.

“I’m gonna tell you something,” Will said, making sure his smile didn’t fall. “I need you to listen, and then we need to come up with a plan. If you still want that.”

Hannibal nodded and Will turned away and pushed the stopper in the tub, letting the hot water gather for their bath. He turned back then, facing Hannibal, and picked back up the beer bottle.

“Do you have anything other than bar soap?” Hannibal asked as he unfolded his legs and sat back in the rising water, thighs still twitching.

Will retrieved the half empty bottle of citrus body wash and poured some under the tap. It reminded him of Matthew, but that needed to be set aside. “Men’s 3-in-1, your liege.”

He enjoyed the twitch of Hannibal’s nose, and laughed a little to himself as he settled into the bath, knees bent and unarmed. Thoroughly vulnerable. Hannibal’s eyes caught his and they both smiled. The intimacy was nearly unbearable.

“You have something important to say?” Hannibal pressed, gorgeous and blushing.

“I want to start off clean, when we leave,” he replied, as vaguely as he could manage. *Why was it so difficult to tell the truth?* “I don’t want to be a cop, or an agent, or a criminologist. Anything like that.”

It was out, and his cheeks were burning. He couldn’t meet Hannibal’s eyes. He busied himself fussing with the tap and crossed his arms close to his chest in the water.

“In relation to my crimes, or the crimes of others?” Hannibal asked, watching him carefully.

That delineation was blurry, but in the moment Will chose.

“I’m rethinking my frame of mind when it comes to criminality. I’m not interested in intervening in what you do. I’m still sitting with feelings of vengeance, but I’m trying to look at this with a...this change can be about learning, you know?”

Hannibal's face lit up and he leaned forward. All of the confusion seemed to disappear as he gleefully asked questions.

"You've spent so much of your life on one side of the line. It would be natural to try something different. The question must be begged, can you stomach engagement? Not that engagement is the only way to cross that line. Would you like to be an observer? What made you come to this decision?"

Will laughed at his enthusiasm and answered bluntly, for once. "I'm *saying* that I want to kill Will Graham."

Hannibal's smile widened, and his eyes danced with light. "The human body can lose up to 14%, or 0.7 liters of blood a day, and human blood can be kept cold for 40 days without degradation. A month and ten days to get it right, starting now."

Will smiled back at him, because of course he would understand.

"And," Hannibal continued, "I know precisely who to frame for our murders."

"Our?" Will asked.

"If you'll have me," Hannibal said, "I would consider it an honor to die by your side."

Will knelt forward, the water sloshing around him, and kissed Hannibal slowly. With his lips pressed against his mouth, he gave his answer.

"I thought you'd never ask."

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal: 👏👅💅🙏 really loving tonight for me
Will: this unit has overheated. please turn off and on again.
Hannibal: better get this girl home
Will: I wanna suck the dick of the devil!
Hannibal: of course you do, gorgeous
Will: 😀 kill me
Hannibal: 😍 kill US

STORY UPDATE

Chapter Summary

BREAK FROM REGULAR POSTING

hello dear readers. I know it's been a long time but I am still here. As an indigenous person, I am having such trouble trying to write about death and destruction with what is going on in Gaza. My heart is just not in it right now. I don't know how long my grief will hold on to me, I don't know how long these people will have to suffer. I will find my way back here, any God give us strength.

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Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!